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LOVE LETTERS

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LOVE-LETTERS

OF A

WORLDLY WOMAN

BY

MRS. W. K. CLIFFORD

AUTHOR OF "MRS. KEITH'S CRIME," ET

"Wherefore? Heaven's gift takes earth's abatement."

DONOHUE, HENNEBERRY & CO.

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PREFACE.

THESE be three women who loved the world : not meaning (at least two of them) the pomps and vanities, but the round world itself and the people who belong to it. All had the bandage lifted from their eyes, and as they became wise proved how sad a thing is wisdom. The first tried to comfort herself with dreams, and waits, hoping that they will find their way into the waking hours. The second played an eager, restless game, staking all her happiness on it, and perhaps gained most when she had lost it. The third looked up at sorrow, and, seeing a little way beyond, set out on a journey; but she does not know yet where it will end. And the moral is—but morals are depressing even if they are edifying : let us leave them to the Preacher. L. C.

A MODERN CORRESPONDENCE

I

SHE.—ON THE DULLNESS OF GOODNESS.

IT is a long time since we met—long, that is, as we have been in the habit of measuring time lately—nearly a month. Two months and meeting every day, often twice a day, but never missing once; then a little pause a flagging, a going-to-town, and two days apart—days that were hard to bear for both of us; then a week, now a fortnight. At first your letters compensated me; now they do not. Are they colder? I do not know. Not in words, perhaps, but they do not send a rush of joy through me as they did a little while since. They seem to come from your intellect, your good-nature, that would not like me to feel neglected, your affectionate disposition, not from your heart. Are you beginning to turn restive, to think things over, to wonder

how it was we found the past so sweet that we were content to spend whole days by the river-side, talking the driftless dreamy talk of happiness, or silently watching the river as it went on, seeking, perhaps, the place which a little later our feet would know—but not together.

I remember your telling me once—was it with dim foreboding of a future that now, perhaps, draws near?—that women took things more seriously than men. They are the foolish women. I am going to be wise—to remember as long as you remember, and forget as soon. I think I am doing so already—if you are. Why should man, who is strong, always get the best of it, and be forgiven so much; and woman, who is weak, get the worst and be forgiven so little? Why should you go and laugh and be merry, and I stay waiting and listening? But this shall not be, for I am not the woman to sit and weep while the world is wide and the days are long, and there are many to—to love me? I do not know; to come and make a sweet pretence of love; and who shall say how much or how little heart will be in it? It is delightful to be a woman—yes, even in spite of all things; but to be a weak woman, and

good with the goodness invented for her by men who will have none of it themselves; no, thank you. It is a sad mistake to take things seriously, especially for women (which sounds like a quotation from Byron, and is almost), but it is a mistake that shall not be mine. Let us keep to the surface of all things, to the to-day in which we live, forgetting the yesterdays, not dreaming of tomorrows. The froth of the waves, the green meadows and the happy folk walking across them laughing; the whole world as it faces the sky: beneath are only the deep waters, the black earth, the people sorrowing in their houses, the dead sleeping in their graves. What have we who would laugh in common with these? Nothing.

Dear, your letters have grown too critical, too intellectually admiring. You said in one of them last week that you reverenced me for my goodness. I do not want reverence; it goes to passion's funeral. And I do not want to be good either, for that means a person knowing all her own possibilities and limits. It is only of the base and mean things that one should know one's self utterly incapable; for the rest it is better to give one's nature its

fling, and let it mak walk for itself, good or bad, as its strength goes.

Good! Oh, but I am glad to be far from that goal. No woman who is absolutely and entirely good, in the ordinary sense of the word, gets a man's most fervent, passionate love, the love beside which all other feelings pale. A wear-and-tear affection, perhaps, tideless and dull, may be her portion, but it is not for good women that men have fought battles, given their lives, and staked their souls. To be good, to know beforehand that, under any given circumstances, one would do the right thing, would stalk along the higher path of moral rectitude, forever remembering and caring above all things, for one's own superiority, while the rest of the world might suffer what it would; it appalls me to think of it. Besides, how deadly dull to herself must the good woman be, how limited her imagination, how sober her horizon; she knows her own future so well there is little wonder she grows dowdy living it. To feel that there is no unexpectedness in her nature, nothing over which to hold a rein, to know that no moment can come when, forgetting all else,

she will give herself up to the whirlwind that may overtake her in a dozen forms, and then, if need be, pay the price without flinching and without tears. For tears and repentance and reformations are all the accompaniments of goodness that once in its weakness is overcome. How I loathe them and the expiation with which some women would bleach their souls. Did you ever stop to think what expiation means? Probably some monkish-minded ancestor who was addicted to scourging himself putting his ghostly finger across one's brain, and so waving his torturing lash down through the ages. Give me, then, the strength to raise by head and say, "Yes, it was I, and I will pay the price cheerfully, for the joy of remembering will sustain me to the end, and repentance I have none."

I wonder if husbands are so often unfaithful because their wives are good? I think so. They cannot stand the dreary monotonies and certainties. They give them affection and reverence—and go to the women who are less good, and love them. I wonder if the wholly good men, are the best loved? Not they. They, too, like the good women, are treated to

the even way of dull affection. The bravest ment the strongest, the most capable to do great deeds when the chance comes, and of waiting for the chances as best they can: they are the best loved. It is, in fact, the mystery that lies in people as in fate that is the fascination—the wondering, the toss-up whether it will be good or bad to us or to others. For this makes life keen living and love a desperate joy. It is so with the whole of humanity. Say what we will for goodness—and in the abstract it is the soul's desire of most of us—the world would be a dull place to live in if all the wickedness were stamped out; too dull to satisfy mortal men and women. We may owe our solid happiness to the good, but we owe life's color and variety and excitement to the wicked: never let us underrate them. Are you shocked, *cher ami?* But in these latter days we have taken to writing sermons to each other. Mine, at least, has the advantage of being genuine. If it does not please you I cannot help it. I would not have you even always pleased, for it would bore me sadly. You asked me once (do you remember the long grass was dipping in the river, and I watched it while you spoke), "if I

would always be the same?" I answered, Yes—untruthfully enough, but I could not help it. Would I have you always the same? I ask myself, as I sit here; and the answer comes to my lips quickly, Not I. Hot and cold, a stir to one's pulse, a chill to one's heart, a formal word that makes one's lips close as though ice had frozen them, a whisper that sets one's blood tingling with sudden joy. All this is life and love, not vegetation and affection.

Don't think I do not long after good things. Oh, my dear, do we not all long after them, and so sanctify our souls that are not able to do more. It is so easy to sit at the base of a tower and wish we stood on the top; it is another thing to climb it little step by little step. If one could be hauled up in some strange dangerous fashion it would be worth doing, though one risked one's neck by the way. So if by a few great deeds one could reach the heights, who that has any fire in his soul would not do them, though they crushed the life out of him for a time—nay, though he died by the way? But the unvarying goodness of daily life, one day as like another as one step is like another; and the getting to the top of one's moral

plateau at last—for what? For some abstract praise, some measured admiration, while those one loved best felt most one's far-offness from themselves. It would be like the chilly tower-top, standing there alone, the wind sweeping past, the world below going merrily by, unheeding. Is it worth it? No. Preach no more of goodness to me; and as for reverence, keep it for the saints.

You have provoked all this from me with your dreary, unsatisfying letter, and your half-finished sentence, "And in the future"—Why did you stop? Did you fear to go on? Well, and in the future? Do you think any woman will love you as I have loved you; will forget you as completely as I will forget if I choose; will scorn you as well if it comes to it; will be as constant or as fickle, as passionate or as cold? It may be, but I think not, for my strange heart is given to the Fates to wring with what agony they will, or to fill to the brim with joy, and out of either I can give lavishly.

Do you understand me? I doubt it. I stand here by the gate of many things, wondering if the latch shall be left up—or down forever. For when the summer-day is done the twilight

comes, sweet enough for the dawdlers who would sit and dream alone, but not for me with the wild blood dancing through my viens. Draw down the blinds, say I, and bring the flaring lights; the guests of the day may go, but the guests of the night will come—ready to begin what perhaps you are ready to end. In the beginning are life and promise and love; but in the end? In the end one lies down to die—and forget. Good-bye.

II

HE.—AN OFFER OF MARRIAGE.

MY DEAREST GIRL,—You know I never comprehend your letters; but perhaps that is one reason why I like them. I never altogether comprehend you, which is also perhaps the reason why I love you, for I do upon my soul I do, in spite of the nonsense you talk about affection and vegetation and wickedness, and the rest of it. I sometimes feel as if you had taken me for some one else when I read your letters—some one you had set up and thought to be me. It's odd, but I used to have the same sort of feeling in the summer, when you seemed to see from one direction and I from another. I don't want you to make that kind of mistake, dearest; it would be a bad lookout for me if you did. Now, let us speak plainly, have things out, and be done with it; then it will be plain sailing, and we shall both be better for it—better, anyhow, than if we went

on with fine words and vague phrases for a twelvemonth.

If my letters have been cold lately, or seemed so, it has not been that I have not cared for you, or don't, as much as during all those jolly days by the river, when we were too lazy to talk even about ourselves. But you know one can't be always at high pressure; besides, I am getting on, and though one may still be able to talk nonsense occasionally, and in the country, yet after the turn of five-and-thirty a man isn't so ready to go on with it when he is once more back in town, among people, and planning his life, as I am. This doesn't make me less sincere, mind; I like you better than any one else, I expect, but I am a good deal taken up with other matters. I am anxious about Carpeth. K—— is certain that I have a good chance of getting in, and I seriously contemplate standing. Of course, as you already know, I don't care a straw about politics, and should never attempt to talk; still, getting into Parliament is a respectable sort of thing to try for—unless you are a Radical; gives you influence in the country, and so on. Then I am bothered about those beggars and their farms.

I remember telling you that they wanted their rents lowered, rather unfairly, I think. Then my mother is always at me to settle down—before she dies, she says, having a fancy that that won't be long, though I hope with all my heart it will; and she wants me to marry my cousin Nell. I like Nell well enough, and no doubt we should jog along comfortably together, but I am much fonder of you, though if you throw me over I dare say I shall try my chance with Nell. So you see there's been some excuse for pre-occupation in my letters.

In spite of what you say I do reverence for you for your goodness. Look what a brick you were to your brother and his wife last year, and I know if you marry me that you will make me, as you would any man you loved, a good and true wife. Be the sensible girl I have always thought you, and write and say it is all right, and I will tell the mater at once, and let us get married as soon as Carpeth is settled. Don't think I have ceased to care for you because I don't write you sentimental letters, or see you twice a day, as I did at Wargrave, where there was nothing to do but to loaf round and hang about the river till dinner time.

While I think of it, what I meant by "and in the future," was just in effect what I have said here, only somehow I could not get it to the tip of my pen than as I do now. Of course we went on at a rapid rate this summer, but you see we were thrown a good deal on each other, and there's always something enticing in the river, and the willow-weed, and the towing-path, and all the rest of it. I am really awfully fond of you, too, and when a man is alone with a woman he likes, and nothing particular besides on his mind, he would be a duffer if he didn't run on a bit. Still, I am not a very romantic sort; when I was two-and-twenty I had rather a quencher with that girl I told you of once; she cut up rough after playing the fool with me to the top of my bent, and that has done its work. Besides, talk as you will about affection, it's the best thing to get married on; blazing passion fizzles out pretty soon and leaves precious little behind. It says a good deal for the strength and genuineness of my feeling for you that, after the speed of last summer, I can still in the cool of the autumn declare, as I do, that I am sincerely fond of you.

Of course I know that if I am matter-of-fact

you are the reverse, but if you won't be angry at my saying so, I think that comes of the life you lead. Living with a brother and sister-in-law, and no settled place in the house or home of your own, shutting yourself up with books, or stealing off to some quiet spot to read them, and going out all night when you are in town and being told, no matter where you are, by half a dozen fellows that they are in love with you; that can't be a healthy sort of life for any woman. You will lead a far better and more natural one if you settle down with me as I hope you will.

Now, write me a long letter and tell me all that is in your heart and mind about this. Let me know just what you think, for I could never for the life of me quite make out what you were driving at when we were together. But, above all, tell me that you love me, as you did in the summer when you put your head down on my arm and yet would never say the plain, honest "Yes" I tried to extract from you. Then I will somehow make time to run down on Saturday and stay till Monday, as I long to do. Good-night, my dear one.—Ever yours.

P. S.—Let me hear by return if you can, for

I have a good deal of anxiety one way and another, and shall be glad to get this off my mind.

III

SHE—SOME VIEWS ON MARRIAGE.

GET it off your mind by all means. I would not marry you for the world. Marry your cousin Nell, with whom you will jog along well enough; go in for Carpeth; raise or lower your tenants' rent, and settle down to your uneventful life without me. It would drive me mad. There is enough of nothing in your heart or soul to satisfy me. I like you; I have loved you—perhaps I do still; but marry you—no; for I should surely run away, and before a year was over, if it were only to hide in a dim corner with amused eyes to watch your perplexity. I see how good you are, manly and straightforward—all that and more; but to settle down with you—to know the end of my days almost as well as the beginning; to live through the long, dull, respectable years with you—no, thank you. You must marry your cousin Nell; and I, if I marry at all, will marry a man whose

future is not unrolled, like yours, before my eyes—some one who has it in him to leave the world richer than he found it, who will teach it, or beautify it, or make it in some way better because he has been. For men who do this are the masters of the world, and men like you, rich or fairly rich, good, plodding, and painstaking, are their servants. They enjoy your acres, which you keep trim for them; your houses, the doors of which open wide to receive them; and they pay you wages in the shape of benefits you get from their genius. Yes, you will marry your cousin Nell, go into Parliament, helping your country with vote or presence—for that is how, as you indicate, your political capacity will be bounded; you will enjoy your easy-going life, and die when your turn comes. You will do no work that others could not do equally well, and never fret or fire your soul with more than a little anxiety, a little fatigue or vexation; and even these will calm down or be forgotten with your first teaspoonful of soup at dinner—your dull, well-mannered dinner of five courses with the salad and the savory left out. Oh, my dear, whom I loved through all the long, still

days of this past summer, what a revelation your letters have been to me. I should go mad if I married you. No; if I marry at all, it must be to some one who works—works truly, not for himself and for his own position or respectability's sake, but for the work's sake and the world's sake; a man who is a part of the great machinery that models the future ages; not a mere idler by its wheels hanging about, amusing himself for his day, dying when his turn comes, and leaving no trace behind. There are crowds of these, well enough in their way, with their cheery voices and pleasant faces; let other women marry them. The world would be a terrible place if it were made up entirely of the minority towards which my soul leans. There would be all to work, but none to work for; all to give, and none to receive. Yes, the world is well for the like of you, for the majority that takes life easily, battling a little for itself and its own, leaving the workers to build up the world; but it is to these last that my heart goes out. A soldier who has fought for his own land, and so helped its people; a thinker who, unseen himself, has swayed vast numbers; a law-giver who has de-

vised the codes by which coming races may guide themselves; a traveler who makes the first lonely track into the unknown land, and then comes back to direct the road-makers how to work on towards the great city that, but for him, would have been unsuspected—any one of these holds in his hand the seed of immortality.

But it is not only the leaders who have it. The poet who writes, and the singer who sings, the words the soldiers hear as they march by; the beggar who sits starving in his garret, all the while creating that for which the whole world will rejoice, though he dies or goes into the crowd not knowing, letting others get the reward of his work; the martyr who keeps his lips shut and will not cry out lest others should lose heart; all these, too—these are the masters who prove that greatness is a thing that must be put ouside one's self to live. With one of these there would be life with its promises and possibilities, a chance to help, though it were only by serving the worker as his servant. Bitter grief, keen disappointment, throbbing pain might come; what then? It is for their alternatives one makes, and what chance of them would there be along your monotonous way?

And with all my longings and ambitions, and all that they would mean, would the present friendships that some men give their wives, that you in fact offer me, suffice? And the realities of your life, would they satisfy me? Not quite. I should go away. I remember being told of a woman who said she would rather have the one true passionate devotion of the worst man that ever lived than all the affection and respect and regard—but these only—that the best could give. I did not understand her then. I do now. For the first has in him the fire that may any day leap upward; but the other has only an even light by which one would see to everlastingly measure and excuse him. Beside the first one might walk through hell unheeding its flames; beside the last heaven itself would be monotous. This is what I meant in scoffing at goodness; what I mean now in turning, almost with a shudder, from the idea of being your wife, even though I still have some lingering love for you. The boundaries of goodness are known well enough, but in the bare possibilities of their being broken down there is a strange uncertain vista that fascinates me. It is the unknown quanti-

ties, the mysteries, that set one thinking and make one eager. Is not the world itself round, so that we see but a little way ahead? How, then, can you expect me to accept my portion of it so flattened and laid out before me that I can almost see the whiteness of my own tombstone at the other end? No, let us end it all. Go to your life; leave me to mine.

Marriage between us is not possible. A service might be read over us, one roof might cover us, one name identify us; but this would not be marriage—only a binding together by a ceremony made for those not strong enough to stand by each other without it, which in the eyes of the outer world, would make us man and wife, yet in our own hearts leave us miles apart. The most dreamy of relationships might be marriage rather than this; nay, I can imagine it existing between two people who meet but half a dozen times in their lives, who never touch hands, who but dimly remember each other's faces, and yet whose hearts and souls steal out in the silence towards each other and meet in some strange fashion not known to ordinary men and women—an aching, almost passionate love, that has nothing physical in it,

and that seeks no human symbol for expression save that which puts itself forth in their work. Even this would satisfy me better than what you offer me, in which there would be the ever longing for more than you could even comprehend. And yet it would not satisfy me. I am not Idealist enough, nor poet neither. I am a woman, and alive to my finger ends; and, if I am loved at all, would be loved wholly and altogether, as a man who is alive, too, and part of the living world, knows how to love. I want a face that satisfies me to look at, a voice to hear, a hand to grip, a firm and even footstep to listen to unconsciously as an accompaniment to our talk while we go through the streets together. I can not help caring for these things, for I am human, and have the longings of human womanhood. But there are other longings, too—longings that lift the human ones up, and give them the idealism that is necessary to one's soul's salvation; and these last hang on the first: they are all inseparable.

I have written on, never once considering how it may hurt you. It is better, perhaps, if I do hurt you, for some wounds must be seared

in order that they may be healed. Insulting, heartless, cruel, some dolts who saw this letter might call me; but I am none of these. I have spoken out fearlessly all that was in my heart and mind, as you wished me to do. I might have been more gentle, have used words less plain, and so nourished my own vanity on your regrets at losing me. And heartless? no. If I were, I should be content to take ease and comfort and the world's goods, all of which you would give me for my portion, and concern myself about little else; should be content with the simple affection you offer me instead of pushing it away, because my hungry heart needs more. We had our summer day, dear, and it was good to live through; but now, go to your cousin Nell, contest Carpeth, see to your tenants, and good-bye. Yes, good-bye, dear Englishman; only our own land could have produced you; and in a measure I am proud of you, as I am of all its other goodly products. But for warmth and sunshine one goes to other lands than ours; for love and happiness I, at least, must go to other heart than yours. Better for you that it is so, for I should have tried you sorely.

IV

HE.—EXPOSTULATING.

I REALLY don't know how to answer your letter, for of course I am going to answer it; it's odder than ever, more than ever like you, my darling. You are not very polite, are you? But perhaps I am not either, for the matter of that. For the life of me I can't understand you, can't make out what you are driving at, and I am not sure that you know yourself. You say that you love me; then why on earth can't you be content to marry me? I love you, I am very fond of you, though I won't pretend that I can go at the rate you seem to desire; but, as I said in my last letter, passion soon fizzles out. Romance is all very well when you are young, but middle-age is a time that most of us come to, and then what's to become of it? As for life with me being so dull, we can't be always going in for excitement; but you would get enough of it, I expect, and you could make yourself prominent in lots of ways if you wished to do so. I would

do anything in reason to make you happy, or to please you as far as I could. If you want change and movement and new experiences, we might go about a good bit. I remember your saying in the summer-time that you would like to travel. We might go and look up some scenery in Italy or Switzerland, or if you wanted anything more extensive take a run over to America, though I don't expect you would find that very exhilarating, and I never cared for republics myself. Even Paris is spoilt by going in for democracy and that sort of thing.

I think you are vexed with me because I told you frankly that if you would not have me I should try my luck with Nell. But you can't expect me to keep single because you don't think me lively enough to marry yourself. I am getting on, thirty-six next January, quite time that I settled down; I feel that I ought to do so; besides, if I wait too long no one will have me. Of course it is easy enough to talk as you do, but take my word for it, your feelings are not what is wanted for daily life. They are all very well in the books you have got yourself into the habit of reading, but they won't work outside the covers in which you find them. I don't

believe in Darwin, as you know—not that I ever read much of him, I confess, but I made out what he was up to pretty well—and I never read but one of Zola's novels; and as that was a translation, I take it for granted the color was a good deal toned down, but it was quite sufficient to convince me that women did well not to read him at all. I say this because bits in your letter sound like the talk one hears among the prigs whom it is the correct thing to meet at some houses nowadays, or the articles one sees in the heavy reviews. Not that I ever talk much to the first or read the last—know better than that, my darling. I prefer being on the river with you. But one can't help knowing what's in the air, and it all somehow harks back to Darwin and Zola, two schools, or whatever you call them, that seem to be running neck and neck just now among the people who go in for thinking. But they come to no good, dearest; they have only made you want some artificial kind of career. Now it's my opinion that a woman ought to find the life of her home and the companionship of her husband, and later on of her children, sufficient, and that's what most sensible men think, too.

Content yourself with them, my dear one, and give yourself to me with a light heart. You shall indulge in as many fancies as you please, and have as much amusement as I can reasonably give you, and we will do a whole lot of going about from first to last if you like.

Of course I have got some acres and must look after them, if it is only to keep them trim, as you say, for the beggars you call my masters; and as for fighting, or inventing things, or writing books, none of these is in my line, and I am glad of it. A nice comfortable life, enough money, and a good digestion have fallen to my share, and I am quite content with it; if you fall to my share too I shall have nothing else to wish for, after I have secured Carpeth.

I cannot think what has changed you all of a sudden, for we got on so well in the summer, and we managed to get awfully fond of each other, or I did of you, and you at any rate were happy enough with me. Be happy again, my darling; as I said in my last letter I say again in this: I love you better than any one else, though I own I shall try and win Nell if you throw me over. But don't, I implore you, just for the sake of

all that you have lately taken to dream about, give away realities. Life isn't a thing that comes to us more than once in this world, anyhow—or that lasts too long, and it's a pity not to make the best of it; I don't think that you would make the worst of it by giving yourself to me. Now write another one of your queer letters if you like, and say not only that you love me, but that you'll marry me. You can't think how happy you would make me, and I won't believe you were playing fast and loose with me all the summer; if you were not, why it's all right, and let us get married soon. We would move about as much as you pleased till I was obliged to be back in England again; and I feel sure that that is what you want to ease off some of your excitement and restlessness, and make you content with ordinary life again. Good night, dearest; write at once and let me know precisely what your views are now.—Affectionately yours.

V

SHE.—EXPLAINING FURTHER, AND CONCERNING PASSION.

NO, I cannot write as you desire. We are so utterly different. A month ago I did not see it; now I do, for your letters have made all things clear. By the river we felt the same breeze, the same sunshine; we thought they had the same effect upon us, that in all things we felt alike. The days we spent together were drowsy summer ones, and you were a dream to me; perhaps I was one to you. We did not talk much, not enough to find each other out, and it is to that we owe our memories. I am glad to have mine; I was so happy and I loved you, remember, which sanctifies them, so that I am not ashamed because of the long hours in which I was wholly content.

But life is not spent by the river-side, or in a dream. The summer is over, we are awake, and our story is finished. To attempt to live our lives together would be madness,

You must marry your cousin Nell. She will be a better wife to you than I could be at my best. She probably belongs to the type you like, and that the majority of men like, when they want to marry and settle down—the wife and home and motherhood type that nineteen centuries of Christianity have taught us, and rightly, to admire. But I do not belong to it, and cannot.

I could hardly bear to read your offers of travel. It was as though you were trying to bribe me with them, knowing that of love there was not enough. How dreary those journeys would be! Worse even than the long evenings when we looked at each other across the dinner-table, and then from either side the fireplace, glancing now and again at the clock, thinking how slowly it went towards the point at which we might rise, and with dull satisfaction feel that the day was over. I can imagine our setting out; I can see us on our way, you with your time-table and guide-book, your Gladstone bag and portmanteaus, easy-going and good-tempered, anxious about your food and deliberating as to the hotels, always spending your money with an easy hand, yet seeing

that proper attention was paid you. I can almost hear what you say as I walk beside you, my Englishman in tweeds, along the railway platforms; and I can see myself, too, a little tired, and disagreeably inclined towards other people, snapping at my maid for being forgetful, yet meekly listening to your instructions. How we should drag through the cities, looking at picutres and pretending that we cared about them, or yawn at *table d'hôtes*, or go off to see bits of scenery because other people went, but secretly feeling bored by them as by most things; I getting more and more tired, and you reflecting that after all there was no place like one's own home. I could not endure it. Yet I could tramp gaily in tatters across great plains, or over the mountain-tops with a beggar who was a poet, a mechanic who was a genius, a dreamer who talked of a waking time to come. I could go merrily enough through the cities, though we had never a coin between us to pay for a sheltering roof. We would rest beyond the gates, crouching under a hedge to sleep, and sitting by a lonely way-side, cook our scanty food with the help of the little tin canteen we carried with us. I should think of

the time when the city we had left would ring with my hero's name, of how he would lead his soldiers through it, or teach those who wanted to learn, or help those who suffered now and must wait till he was ready. "They do not know his name yet," I should say to myself; "they did not even look up at his face as we passed by, but they will, they shall, for some, day the whole wide world will be but the setting for his work." All nonsense and exaggeration, you will say. Yes, dear; it is, and I know it. But over a bridge built of dreams and exaggerations, Love often goes blindfolded toward the realities it may never reach itself, leaving a track that the stronger may follow, and would not have thought out for themselves. To the lovers and the dreamers and enthusiasts it is sometimes given to move the world with their shoulders; the plodders do it stone by stone while the ages admire their patience. The last are like school-boys learning, but to the first the heavens and hells have whispered.

Passion soon fizzles out, you say, and you think only of the passion of a wicked French novel. There is another type of man, unlike enough to your healthy, manly self, who does

this—the man who is above all things intellectual, who has much book-knowledge, and has read and remembered and stored his mind with the work of other men, so that his talk and writings are full of literary allusion. Through his mind there filters constantly a stream of other men's thoughts; if that gave out his mind would be empty, for he creates nothing. His mission he takes to be to tinker at other men's work and appraise it, and he does, seeing it usually by a borrowed light. Learned and lukewarm, cold and cynical towards most things that have not been dust these hundred years, he has no more passion in him than he has genius. An odd, incomplete creature, a modern refinement—for he would often be a little fashionable in these latter days, and is to be met with at dinner-tables and country houses, and traced in our literary journals—I sometimes wonder where the good of him comes in, for he gives the world nothing that is his own, and that which he finds ready to hand is no better for his commenting and garnishing, but rather the reverse. It is him I think, on whom your mind is running when you talk of Zola and Darwin, but he has nothing in common with either; and you

and he have nothing in common—which is all to the good of you—except that both of you think that passion is usually dashed with wickedness, and has but one meaning attached to it. The very word you consider an undesirable one to use, especially before women or in polite society. You are not quite sure that it is proper.

But the passion I mean, and would have in my lover's heart, was in Joan's when she rode into Rheims to crown her king. If it had lasted a little longer it would have deadened the outward flames at her burning, and her shrieks would not have echoed in our ears through all the centuries. It was in Napoleon's heart when he strode on before his army and thought the whole world would be his. It was in Samuel Plimsoll's heart when he stepped forth and by a passionate moment won his cause. A score of men along the benches might have lulled each other with their dull platitudes for a score of years without doing what that one moment's fire did. It is in the novice's heart when she hears the great gate clang behind her, and, raising her clasped hands, thinks that she will surely one day scale the heights of

heaven and see her Saviour's face. Read "St. Agnes' Eve"—Tennyson's, not Keat's I mean—and you will understand. My heart has stirred to it till I could have thrown the book aside, and walking through the frosty snow to the convent, have besought them to let me in for one moment to stand beside the white-veiled figure, and see the light as it never is seen by the sayers of prayers and singers of hymns in the stifling churches of the world. But this was only a passing feeling, a power of the poet's, that proves him and not one's self. And it is not the whole of what I mean, for I want all that is in the novice's heart, but more added on. I do not want your reverence, I told you, and that is true, and I do not want to be good, absolutely good, for that means being bound by finite possibilities, and it is the infinite in all things, good and evil, that has the eternal power. And I would like all feelings in my lover's heart to have their fling, while we, whom the issue most concerned, breathlessly awaited the result, leaning to this side or that according to our strength, or that which was brought to bear on it. For men and women are not meant to kill their strong-

est feelings and impulses, but only to understand them, to know when to govern or to let themselves be governed. To this last knowledge the world owes the greatest deeds that men have done. In passion there is fire, and does not fire purify as well as burn? The prairie planes sweep all growths before them as they make unflinchingly towards their goal, and the goal of passionate love at its highest is achievement that, but for its sake, would never have been gained. It is the achievement I long for, not for myself, but for my best-loved; I would go away if he willed it, when he needed me no more, and be remembered nowhere save in his heart. I should know the fire there. Did not Prometheus filch it from heaven? Perhaps it would mount higher and higher on good work done till it touched the heavens again.

But all this you think mere craving for excitement, a lack of repose, an aching to be prominent. It is none of these. Still, in my heart there is nevertheless a leaning forward towards the future—not my own future, but the whole world's. Nonsense, you will say; what have I to do with that? We have all to

do with it; we cannot separate ourselves off from it, for this present self-consciousness that we call life is not the whole of us unless we choose. There is one thing ours from the time we enter the world, if we did but know it—it is part of life's mystery that we should so seldom know it—the power to fashion our own immortality, not in our own bodies, but in the things we do. A sort of choice or chance—which is it?—seems to be ours, to seek the stars or tread the depths. Have we not come out of the past leaving strange histories we cannot even remember behind us? Here in our present day we choose, so it is given to me to feel, whether we will let the potentialities stamp us out, or whether, having in some shape paid the world for its light and shelter, its love and joy, though its alternatives were pain and woe, we go on into the future ages stronger for that with which we have nourished our souls. Oh, my dear, it is not excitement that I want. I believe I could wait long years to meet a single day, and having known it live long years again remembering, though never a ripple stirred Time's surface before or after. But I could not be content

with your life and its lack of possibilities. You would not ask me to go to you hungry if you had no food, shivering if you had no shelter. Yet this would be little beside the starvation you offer me. Why should I give up to you all my chances, all my ambitions, my hopes and longings, the wild love and satisfying life that may be mine—nay, my pain and bitter woe, for I would miss none—and the work that will surely some time come to my eager hands and heart, for what? To please you now for just a little space, till you awoke to realize that life together was not what you had imagined it would be, that something was wrong, was missing, you could not tell what; while I, who had never slept, would understand well enough all the time, and some day, feeling the twitch of the demon's finger on my arm and his whisper in my ear, I should vanish, how or where I should hardly know. For the marriage vow between us would not be one that bound my soul, and my feet would be swift to follow that whither it went. To hold fast by one's soul as long as may be is the wisdom of the gods.

It is no use saying more. Perhaps you are right in thinking that I don't know what I am

driving at. Do any of us know whither we are going? But that does not prevent us from feeling driven; and this I know, that the Fates are driving me with a strong hand away from you. We shall never get nearer to each other, though I write on and you read on forever. Be content with the past. I have loved you. I do. But not with the love that would let me be your wife, content to spend my days by your side, trying to make your days happy; perhaps it is some of your own good-for-wear-and-tear affection that I give you back. I do not know. There are many men like you, thank God—many good women to mate with them, crowds of you both, happy enough to walk along the beaten track with your fellows, doing as they do, being as they are, a rest and comfort for the like of me to take shelter with sometimes, but not to abide with always. For your place is in your home, and your duties are to fulfill the easy obligations that keep it going; but mine, in some strange fashion, seems to be along the world's highway, staying now and again in its workshops, though it be but to watch my masters, or to be cuffed and made to stand aside till my own turn comes. Perhaps I

should be happier if I were like your cousin Nell, and could be satisfied—but I cannot. Home and its influences; a husband who would love me and to love back and help in an easy routine like yours; children with their games and laughter, growing up to be the world's good citizens—sometimes it comes into my heart to long for these, to ache for the rest they would mean, the simple life and further reaching power than those who live within its fences think, the safe and even way that most women yearn to walk, looking neither up at the heights nor down at the depths, but only at the road before them, content enough to tread it. But no. It is so strange, this inner life, with the outer one that hides it—the brother and his delicate wife, the visitors coming and going, the dogs and the horses, the long rides and walks, the pulls on the river or the dreaming beside it, the going to town or to country houses and the hurry of life there, the men, "the half a dozen fellows," as you call them, who talk of love, not knowing how much or how little they mean. It all seems a little way off from me, and yet I am here in the midst. You! Oh, but it has been all a sad

mistake! I loved you, and thought you understood. That you love me, or have loved me, I know well enough; but there is a great space between us, a desert in which we should have to walk if we tried to be together. No, again and forever, no. Your life stands out clear before you, but something tells me that mine has other chapters than this. There are some words that went to my heart long ago. Oh, my dear Englishman, perhaps you will say that they were written by an improper poet. Zola and Swinburne! Marry your cousin Nell by all means. I do but watch and wait like those—

> "... who rest not; who think long
> Till they discern as from a hill
> At the sun's hour of morning song,
> Known of souls only, and those souls free,
> The sacred spaces of the sea.

Some day, perhaps, I shall see and know more, but then I shall not be here. Good-bye, once again.

VI.

HIS MOST INTIMATE FRIEND,—CONSOLING.

DEAR E——, I don't think you an awful cad for sending on her letters, and I dont wonder at your being puzzled by them. Of course I will keep their contents hidden in the innermost recesses of my soul. They are not like ordinary love-letters—thank Heaven. For a nice little note, with a monogram in the corner, a word or two doubtfully spelled, and crammed full of dears and darlings, is worth a stack of these, which might have been written to her great-grandmother.

I take her in pretty well. She isn't altogether a fool, you know; but she is one of the large-minded, great-souled people, longing to suffer and distinguish themselves in the cause of humanity and for the good of the world, who are such a nuisance nowadays. She means well, but she would be death to marry; there's no knowing what she would be up to by the time she was thirty. The amazing thing about

it is that, if I remember rightly, she is that pretty woman who came over with the Fenwicks to my aunt's place last Easter. She was about six or seven and twenty, played lawn tennis better than any one else, flirted all round; and finally drove herself away on a high dog-cart with a learned, half-starved looking cuss, from whom she was probably imbibing some of these notions. Nature made a mistake in sorting out her physique; she ought to have been tall and lank, with long arms, high cheek-bones, and a washed out complexion. All the same, in spite of her good looks, I shudder to think of her as mistress of Bingwell. The only good bit in the whole of her letters is the polite allusion to the savory and the salad. That looks as if she could order a dinner; but she would probably forget to do so half her time, and I suppose she would scorn to eat it—though the material side of her doesn't seem to be undeveloped. Before she had been installed a month you can bet she would have shocked the neighbors and fought with the parson. And what a woman she would be to stay with! She would have an open contempt for her visitors all round, and lead

them a nice life, except the unwashed few she calls the masters of the world. It is really a fine name, if you come to think of it ; somehow it reminds me of Spain, where every beggar in tatters asking for cuartos is a gentleman. No, old man, marry your cousin Nell (in spite of her fancy for life's alternatives, she doesn't seem to like that one of yours), or any other sensible girl who doesn't think she has a destiny or a mission, and thank your stars that this magnificent person would not have you.—Ever yours.

LOVE LETTERS OF A WORLDLY WOMAN.

I

MRS. ROBERT WILLIAMS TO MRS. POWER.

DAFFODIL, BRECON, S. WALES,

January 26, 1884.

MY DEAR MARY,—I am not surprised at your having met Madge Brooke at the C——'s, for she manages to go everywhere now. This, of course, is entirely owing to her brother's position, and to the fact that, instead of making her an allowance and telling her to live alone, as most brothers would, he lets her live with him. The generosity shown by men to their relations is often singularly irritating to lookers-on, and John Brooke furnishes an instance of this in his conduct toward his sister. Some day, however, her reign will end, for he is sure

to marry, in spite of her efforts to keep him single. I shall be curious to see what Madge will do then. Two years ago he was most attentive to my Isabel, and though, of course, Isabel with her advantages did not care about him, the wiles of Madge to prevent a climax were quite ridiculous.

I understand your desire to know all about the Brookes before encouraging an intimacy. I am extremely cautious about new people myself now that my girls are grown up; besides, I feel it due to our long friendship to answer you frankly, as I should like you to answer me.

Madge Brooke and her brother John are the children of my husband's sister. They were left, when their parents died, with an income of one hundred and fifty pounds a year. My own opinion was that this should have been sufficient to prevent them from becoming a burden to other people. Robert, who is always foolishly good-natured, thought differently. The boy was sent to an expensive school, spending his holidays with us, and afterwards went to Oxford; the girl came here. This arrangement was exceedingly unpleasant to me, but I endeavor

to do my duty. Feeling that Madge could not expect to stay here always, especially if anything should happen to Robert, I did not demur at her receiving a good education, so that she might ultimately turn it to account. She grew up to be a tall, graceful girl; some people thought her handsome, and she had a way when she chose, of making people like her. I never cared about her myself or particularly admired her; I prefer a simpler type. People always talked about her a good deal and called her original. I am very thankful that my girls are not original. It is always doubtful how far experiments, whether in human nature or in anything else, will succeed; at present, judging from the fact that Madge is seven-and-twenty and unmarried, she is not a success. Had she been an ordinary woman an ordinary man might have settled down with her. Still, as I say, some people liked her. The Wentworths at the Rectory, for instance, were never tired of seeing her there; she and Nellie Wentworth were inseparable, taking long walks and reading the same books, until they made themselves look absurd. I did not interfere with them, for it took Madge from my children, with

whom I did not care she should spend too much time. This was not because of anything bad in the girl, but because I feel strongly that there should be a line drawn between the children who are properly provided for by their parents and the children left by their parents to the charity of others. This may sound harsh, but is not the Scripture meant for our acceptance in the letter as well as in the spirit? and we are expressly told that God himself visits the sins of the parents on the children, and not for one generation only. We also should make it a point to let children feel the shortcomings of their parents, so that in future years they may profit by the lesson.

When Madge was seventeen or eighteen the Allens at the Grange had on a visit to them a young man called James Harrison. The Allens are those people we asked to our picnic as an after thought when you were here, and who so much admired your children. They are rich, but made their money in business or by speculation, and they and their visitors are altogether uninteresting. Mr. Harrison was a young man in a merchant's office well connected with business people, and so likely to get on.

He fell in love with Madge, who, after being engaged to him for some months, suddenly jilted him; why I could never divine, unless it was as a sign of the originality which is unfortunately her characteristic. I was very angry indeed at her conduct, and her brother having left Oxford, she went to live with him in London, where they were for some time very poor, and pretended to be very happy. Suddenly John Brooke, who had got into a firm of engineers, was sent to India about the construction of a railway. He took Madge with him, and there, and afterwards in England, there was some sort of a flirtation or engagement with Mr. Mark Cuthbertson, a rather clever artist, who does pictures for illustrated papers. He was at school and afterward at Oxford with John Brooke, but was, I believe, very idle, and never did much good. He stayed here once some years ago, and spent most of his time with Madge, who was then a little girl. In India, and afterwards, John Brooke developed genius as an engineer and in everything else he touched. He is really charming, and, as you know, has carried all before him, both in his profession and in society. Though only thirty, I am told

that he makes a large income, and he goes everywhere, especially among intellectual people. He is, however, very obstinate in some ways, and does very odd things; for instance, once when he was obliged to be away for a few months, he allowed Madge to stay at a cottage somewhere in Berkshire with no one to look after her but a woman servant called Janet, who was their mother's maid in the days when she could afford one. I felt it my duty to speak to him about it, but he grew quite angry, and said he didn't care how strange it looked, he could trust Madge (men are so foolish); and if one only took care of realities, appearances righted themselves. So I left her to her own devices and the evil tongue of slander. I did my duty, and the rest was no business of mine. But to show you how perverse she is, once, when John was again abroad, and she alone in London, I offered to go and stay with her; but she declined, on the plea that while her brother was away she wanted to be quite alone. I have always disliked those people who want to be so much alone—it is unnatural. Does not the disciple say it of man, how much more, then, ought we to say it of woman?

I forgot to tell you that, three years ago, Madge was engaged again to a Lieutenant Brian, a young man, the only son of a north country parson who had married an heiress; so that, though he was only in the artillery (she met him, I believe, at a Woolwich ball), he would eventually have been very well off. The engagement ended abruptly, I never knew why, and the young man was killed in some engagement in Egypt. I heard lately that Sir Noel Franks was after her, but that is probably nonsense, for she would, no doubt, be glad enough to make so brilliant a match. Last year she and John Brooke gave a dance, not at Bolton Row, but at a larger house which they hired for the occasion. They asked us, and I went, thinking it might amuse Grace and Isabel; but I regretted it afterwards, for Madge was just as attentive to the merest stranger as she was to me. Lord Arthur Grey danced once with Grace, and evidently admired her, but Madge kept him in her pocket all the rest of the evening—she is that sort of woman.

The young man she jilted so heartlessly called here a few months ago. He was a widower, and wanted to know her address. He had become

rich, I think, or fairly so, and I hoped he would, after all, marry Madge, for he is a man with a strong will, and might have a beneficial influence on her character; but I have not heard of his going to see her—perhaps he thought better of it. The Mrs. Hamilton you saw there when you called is her old friend Nellie Wentworth, who is a widow, for her husband died of sunstroke in India, and left her with one child.

Now I have told you all I can about Madge. You will think that I have written a very expansive letter; but she is a person who somehow irritates me, perhaps because I feel that she is ungrateful for all the care I bestowed on her while she was under my roof, and for the interest I have since shown in her welfare. But she is obstinate and willful, and likes to have her own way so much, that even to give her advice is an unpleasant duty to which I can only occasionally nerve myself.

If you hear or see much of her in London you might tell me of her doings, for as she is my husbands's niece I do not like to lose sight of her. I shall make a point of seeing her soon, for I often feel anxious about her, though she

is no longer young, and since India her complexion has gone off terribly—With best love to your dear girls, I am, your affectionate friend,

MARIA WILLIAMS.

II.

MADGE BROOKE TO MRS. HAMILTON (NELLIE)

BOLTON ROW, MAYFAIR,
February 1, 1884.

DEAREST NELLIE.—No, indeed. I am not changed at heart, no matter how different I am in manner. If my confidence does not go out as readily, if I am more silent, more formal, it is only that I am older, graver, sadder, not that I have changed towards you, dear Nell. That I shall never do. I am just as fond of you as ever, though I do not show it as often or as easily as before—I had learned to be silent—long and much and that restraint and the hiding of her feelings constitute half the power of woman. And to you, dear, I will always be at heart the same—the Madge that was in the days when we

used to hide away from Aunt Maria, and felt so happy when she punished us by taking no notice of our doings. Poor Aunt Maria! I love her as little as ever, and am often angry with myself on her account, but she has really been odious lately; whenever we meet she tries to impress on me that I am old and ugly, and fast becoming of no account—not that I ever was of much account in her eyes. Is not the conduct of relations often amazing? Their singular frankness towards each other, their rudeness, and their total want of appreciation, or else their absolutely blind belief. I do not quarrel with this last—it should be, it is delicious, it is compensation for the skepticism of the rest of the world; but I do quarrel with the first—at least, I don't quarrel, but I try to keep clear of Aunt Maria giving me advice that is wholly disagreeable and thoroughly impossible. But let us leave Aunt Maria and think of ourselves.

You are changed, too, poor Nell, in the six years since we parted. I cannot bear to think of you alone in the world with just your one little child; and yet I envy you—you have a great happiness to remember, a

great love, though sorrow is the price of both. My memories madden me; the hopes and fears, the sweetness and shame of which they are made; oh, that I had yours! Some things are worse than death, dear Nell. Would it not have been worse if your husband had grown cruel and cold and calculating, to have seen him love you less, forget you perhaps altogether? You do not know this grief. Yet, I know all you have suffered, dear, since I saw you last, six years ago, when you waved your handkerchief as we left Bombay.

Yes, dear—yes and yes, of course and forever let us be friends again, close friends if it be possible. Gradually I may thaw, and my face no longer have written on it, as you say it now has, a life's history that is a closed book to you. But you must let me tell you as I can and when I will. We are too old, too sad to sit down as we did when we were girls, and tell or write our innermost thoughts and feelings by the yard. I may tell you all mine if you care to know them; I would share all yours; but confidences must fit and shape themselves into events, and wait on the needs of our hearts and souls.

I wish you were in London, that we met oftener; but if that cannot be so, we will write, and you will at least see that I have not forgotten—that success has not spoiled me. Success? Sad failure, if you did but know.

I wish you were in London. I want you so much to be friends with John again, as you were years ago when you were both children. He has not forgotten you; he would like to see you often here, as I should. He is not a bit spoiled, though he has tasted the sweets of success—dear John.

It was so vexing that Mrs. Power came the only afternoon that you and I had together. . .

I must tell you one odd thing before I finish. You remember James Harrison? It is years since we parted at Daffodil. The other day he suddenly appeared again. He and you, and I have news also from Mark Cuthbertson, who has been long away. It is as if time were suddenly giving up its past. James is very prosperous, a widower with two children. It would be droll if it were not sad.

I cannot write more to-night, and this is long enough as it is. It is quite strange to give myself out—even to you. MADGE.

III

MADGE BROOKE TO HER BROTHER

DEAREST JOHN.—Of course I will see to all the things, and I am delighted to hear that you are coming back. It has been a dull fortnight without you. There is little news—Nellie Hamilton was in town for a few hours last week; but that tiresome Mrs. Power came in and spoiled our talk. Don't let us know Mrs. Power if we can help it; but we must try not to offend Aunt Maria, whose friend she is.

Mr. Harrison (for I will not call him James) has called two or three times, and I have been vexed with myself for being bored by him. His attitude towards everything irritates me, he is so very dogmatic; yet I believe he has the kindest heart behind his badly-made coat. Every one worries or bores me a little now, except you and Nellie. Nellie looks very young and sweet and sad—and she is all three. When you marry, John, dear, I hope your wife will be like Nell; then I shall be satisfied.

Sir Noel Franks asked us to dine on Thursday, but I refused. It seemed a pity to give up a quiet evening together for any dinner-

party in the world. No, I am not flirting with him. Do not be concerned about his feelings, he is too much taken up with the world to be romantic. Perhaps he would marry me; but his last idea is being in love with me. How odd it would be to see him in love. When that comes off, no matter with whom it is, may I be there to see. MADGE.

P.S.—I forgot one bit of news. I met Mrs. Berry. She says Mark is coming back to England next month.

IV

MADGE BROOKE TO JAMES HARRISON.

Thursday.

DEAR MR. HARRISON,—I fear I cannot be at home this afternoon, nor give you the private interview for which you ask. If you will forgive me for saying it plainly, I feel that there is nothing concerning my happiness in which you have a voice; nothing concerning my future that we need discuss together.

For your happiness and your future you have my most cordial good wishes, and believe me, yours sincerely, MADGE BROOKE.

V

THE SAME TO THE SAME.

DEAR JAMES (since you stipulate that I will not call you Mr. Harrison),—Your letter has reached me, of course. Ever since it came I have been staring all the by-gone possibilities in the face. Why did you write it? I tried to prevent your doing so; for it can alter nothing, can do no good. It would have been far better to have left the past alone, instead of trying to rake it back over all these years. You beg me to be explicit; to tell you all that is in my thoughts. You do not know what you are asking; but you have set me wondering how, indeed, to answer you. There is only one way, since you will have it so—to be absolutely and cruelly truthful at last, cost you and me what it will.

You say you feel that I loved you once, and must, in my heart, love you still. You cannot

understand why I was false. You think that but for some outside influence, but for some one who overpersuaded me, and did not like you, I should have been true. It seems so cruel to sweep away the illusion of your life, but I had better do so. There is no love in my heart for you now; there was never any in the past. No one, nothing came between us that had not existed from the first; and, if I was false, it was because I was never true to you—never. You fell in love with me that summer you stayed with the Allens—almost at first sight. I remember how your face used to light up when you spoke to me. I remember your smile when you looked at me, your voice full of love, boyish love, but true and stanch—love of me. I have often wondered at it since, for I was just an unformed girl in those days, with few attractions; but never in all the years since, in which I have been sophisticated enough to doubt anything, has there ever been a doubt of the depth and truth of your love for me.

You were twenty-two and I was seventeen. You were attentive enough all that month you stayed in Wales. Then you went away, rather

to Aunt Maria's vexation, without any hint of intentions. She was never kind to me. She had always hated being obliged to take in a not well-off niece and nephew, so that John and I had a bad time—I worse than he, for he was much away, and when he went to Oxford, his life at Daffodil virtually ended. She wanted to get rid of me. I was a little older than her own daughters; she wanted me marrried before they came out; it would be an excellent thing if you proposed, she said, and impressed on me again and again that I must get married; that it was the one hope of my life, and should be its one ambition. She would not have thought you good enough for one of her own daughters. You were dull and plodding, "something in the City," a third son of a well-to-do merchant, not well off yourself or likely to be. She welcomed you because she wanted you to take me off her hands; but she did not think much of you—you with just three hundred a year and no money besides. But you were good enough for me. We could manage very well on your income, she told me; you would be at your office all day and so not trouble me much. When John left Oxford and set-

tled in London he could live with us and so help out our income—"if he ever made one of his own." I remember those words so well. John! who is now well off and famous. If she could have only guessed in those days what he would have become in these, she would have behaved differently. If she could have guessed that you would grow rich she would have made more of you and thought you far too good for me.

But you went away and made no sign. Then she declared that you had just been flirting with me, she had not really supposed you meant anything, and it was very unlikely I should ever marry; she wondered whether I could not find a situation as companion—it would be no disgrace, far better than living on my relations; and then she wondered if you boasted of your flirtation with me, and hoped I should not take your desertion to heart. You, a man, cannot understand the gall and wormwood, the positive shame all this was to a girl. If I had been a few years older I should not have borne it, I should have gone out into the world and fought it as best I could; later, too, I should have felt that there were other men, other lovers in the

future for me, and eagerly have awaited the right one, or have calmly looked out for one who, at any rate, better took my girlish fancy. But as it was, I felt powerless. I bore her gibes and my own half-shame, and almost prayed that you would return and so stop her sneers; and you came. Aunt Maria asked you for a few days to Daffodil. A cold dread took possession of me as you came up the drive. Your coming felt like the arrival of the executioner, to one who, even if he would, for some strange reason dared no longer live. You devoted yourself to me, and, with alternations of fear and courage, I accepted and repulsed all your attentions—do you remember? Yet, I secretly triumphed where you showed—for you had no shame of loving me, dear James—how much you cared for everything I said and did. How I hate myself for the mean part I played, for my cowardice, my meanness, my vanity. How you will hate and despise me as you read this letter. Thank God—yes, thank God, that it is not possible for any man's love to survive the reading of a letter like this. But it shall be finished through and through to the end, and all things made clear to you at last.

"Has he not spoken yet?" Aunt Maria asked, as day after day of your visit went by and still you left me free. "Perhaps, after all, he is only laughing at you." I felt that, at any cost, I must stop her maddening sneers and prove that I could win an honest man's love. After that? Well, God knows. And so, James, in sheer desperation as well as blind wickedness, I led you on and coquetted with you, till I saw that you were hopelessly my slave, and then I stood aghast, afraid at what I had done, and tried to hold you off.

The last night of your visit was Isabel's birthday party, Neither you nor I will ever forget it, I suppose. When it was over, and while the guests were hurrying away, all at the same moment, as they used to do at those simple Welsh parties, you found me alone in the little study where John used to do his lessons. I had fled there for one moment's peace, one moment to think alone, not knowing that you were behind me. Then it was that you found words to speak, and told me you loved me, and asked me to be your wife. I did not dare to say no—I had encouraged you too much; besides, I knew what would be in store for me if

I let you go away refused. So I nodded my head for answer, feeling, unconsciously, as a gambler when he throws a stake that means life or death, curious and afraid at what next will come; dreading, perhaps, both alike, no matter which way the dice fall. How well I remember it! You put your arms rouud me, I shuddered and turned from the kiss I could not have borne to touch my lips, and knew in that one moment what I had done, what was before me; my eyes were opened; it was like eating of the tree of knowledge. I never said I loved you. You were so absorbed, so overpowered with love yourself, you never noticed my silence. You were unsophisticated, too, James; you had never played lover before, and did not know how much to expect, how much a girl gives back to the man who has won her heart; and all my shrinkings and shortcomings you accepted and put down to shyness. I begged you not to marry me yet; do you remember? I was too young; I said, fearingly.

"In a year?" you pleaded; and I answered:

"Oh no, not in one year, but two; I shall be only nineteen then."

It should be as I wished, you said. You would

wait for me seven years, or seventy, if I would have it so, and you might only know the day would really come when I should be yours. So I consented.

Two years. When we are young they seem like a lifetime. Before two years were over I should have learned to love you, I thought, have grown reconciled to the idea of marriage —or have died. Two years! No world could stand still, no fate remain unchanged through two whole years. There was nothing I would not have consented to do at the end of that long time so that I gained a respite for the moment. Time and change and Fate would arrange things before two years had passed. So we went back to the drawing-room engaged, you and I; you beaming with happiness, I feeling like a prisoner, and yet knowing that I ought to be happy, too; I was engaged, and you loved me; I should be important among all the girls about me; some day, too, I should have a wedding, be dressed in white and stared at by all the village. I felt a little elation now the deed was done that for the moment passed itself for happiness, and made me feel gentle and grateful toward you— grateful to you for rescuing me from the posi-

tion that had been mine until your love came and made the whole world kinder towards me. I think Aunt Maria was angry at the prospect of our long engagement; she had hoped to get rid of me sooner—angry even at the trivial importance the engagement gave me, and she vented her ill-humor in letting me know that the matrimony in view would be humdrum enough.

You went away, and your letters came: those ceaseless letters filled with love, at which I wondered and was flattered and half amused, and yet from which I shrank. Nellie Wentworth, the vicar's daughter, was engaged at that same time. She used to watch for the postman every morning, and only lived from post to post. She kissed her letters when they came and carried them about with her to read again and again through the day. I used to look at her, half wondering, thinking how odd it was to be happy like that—to love like that. When your letters came I read them and put them by. I think I should have shivered if one had touched my face and to have kissed one would have withered me, for girlhood has very strong repulsions which it cannot help. It was an odd feeling to

have towards the man I was going to marry. Do not blame me over-much: I could not help it, and it was not born in me until I had promised to marry you, and your arms had felt like prisoner's chains.

I struggled to be true, to love you, to be kind to you, and tried to write so that you should be pleased. I wanted to be good—oh! I longed more than I can tell you to be good, to be holy, as I had vowed to be a year before my confirmation; and I used to feel that I must be true to you—I must—I must, or all my life be iniquitous. I was so unutterably lonely, too, in those days; I was at the age when one's heart begins to awake, when one's woman's nature begins to assert itself; I wanted, and did not know that I wanted, a true woman's life, its duties and pleasures and love, the love of those I loved; but there was none I loved save Nellie, who was about to be married, and John, who was away, and whose life I expected would be separated much from mine. I was never happy—never for one moment while we were engaged. The one fair and honest thing I did was to jilt you. Thank God I did, for I am not a bad woman; but if, in those

days, I had married a man who did not possess my whole heart, I do not know what might or might not have happened had temptation come in my way—or even if it had not; for I am passionate, James, not merely in my likes, but in my dislikes; and though I never actually disliked you, I should have learned to dislike—nay, to hate an angel had I married one without loving him with all my heart. What I suffered while we were engaged no words can tell. I learned from Nellie Wentworth to know what love might be—to understand the happiness I should be forever shutting out from my life in marrying you. She was so happy at the thought of being her soldier's wife, though she knew that directly they were married he would take her away from all she loved to India. I only loved John in the world, and Nellie herself—just those two, and had no happy home, but I felt I should die if I were married to you and going away alone with you.

Nellie and I told each other all our little secrets—we vowed to tell them all our lives, but I was false in that, too. I could not tell her that I was engaged to a man I did not love, and who yet imagined that I loved him; for I knew

that you did think I loved you. Nellie was always ready to talk of Tom Hamilton, to whom she was engaged; but I never talked back again of you. I couldn't; I wanted to shut you out of my thoughts, and dreaded your coming into my life more intimately than letters brought you.

And still it seemed as if by every post you loved me more and more, and rejoiced more and more at the prospect of our marriage—that marriage of which the thought made my heart stand still, and my face grow cold, for my feelings took a stronger turn, and I liked you less and less instead of more and more.

You came at Christmas; my heart sank as I went down to meet you in the hall. Do you remember how I shunned you during that visit? I wonder you put up with me; but you were miserable—I saw that, though you made no protest.

A month later you wrote, trying to hurry on our marriage. That brought things to a climax. I shed bitter tears over that tender letter of yours, and wished a thousand times that I were dead. I loathed myself that I must pain you so, but still I felt that the time

had come when I could live a lie no longer. So I wrote and begged you let me off. I told you I did not love you and should die if you married me. You know all that followed. I thought you would break your heart from your letters ; but no, you seemed to get over it soon enough—in eighteen months you had married.

Aunt Maria thought I was mad, I think, but it did not matter, for it was soon after John had taken his degree, and he brought me to London. That was the first happiness—that being alone with him and free—that I had known since my dear mother died years and years before, when we were children.

Do not be harsh to me, James, now that you know how it all came about. No one ever came between—no one ; I was false from beginning to end, save when I set you free. It was a long, distinct chapter of life that ended with our half-frantic letters ; yours doubting my words, believing that I did and must love you in spite of myself : mine determined that there should be no more pretence between us, and that I must and would be free. It was in that same chapter that life in London began—the dear

life with my brother John. He was not well-known or well-off then, but poor and struggling. We lived in shabby lodgings on very little money; he was out all day, and I used to walk about the streets, thinking how good it was to be free; how I should have died if we had married; how terrible it would have been if, every night, instead of John coming home to the simple dinner, you had come, and you my husband. Even in thought I shrank from it. Was I not right to break it off? Love is a strange thing that will not be controlled, that will have nothing to do with conveniences, that will not be governed by reason, that may go to the worst and leave the best—a thing altogether beyond our ken; and you my hate me for my conduct—I deserve it—but it was not my fault that I did not love you; I could not help it. Does this explain it all to you at last? It answers your letter to me to-day, too, and all its questions—or nearly all.

But there shall be no more mistakes, and I will answer the chief question yet more plainly. No, no, and forever, no. I cannot marry you. You will be content, you say, to marry me, even if I do not love you—if I will only let you

try to win me, and so on. No, I cannot consent to that. You do not know what you are proposing—my ruin, body and soul, perhaps yours and your children's, for I should be restless and miserable and desperate, and I am a strange woman, to whom fear of many kinds is unknown. I could dare or do some strange things without flinching if I were driven. If I married you I might become torpid, dull, or heavy, or I might—I do not know, I cannot say; I only do know that I should bring you no happiness, and we must be strangers. Before this letter is finished you will probably be thankful that it is so. Don't think that I am cold or ungrateful, for, in spite of my conduct, I am neither. If I were cold it would be easier to marry you; as it is, I cannot. If I ever marry for anything but love—it must be for more than you can give me. Those last words may make you despise me, but I would rather you do that than love me. Your love does not even please my vanity, and that, too, may make you angry, but I cannot help it; so that you do not talk to me of love, I care for nothing concerning you, and I cannot make myself do so, for my heart and soul live wide miles

apart from yours, and will not take account of you.

It made me shudder to read your letter. You have always loved me, you say; you think there has not been a day, an hour, since we parted all those years ago, in which you have not loved me. I could think of nothing when I read those words but of how terrible it must have been for your wife. No wonder she died, poor soul! I seem to feel her reproachful eyes upon me; I can imagine her face, grave and sad, her poor lone heart aching for that which was never hers—no wonder she died. Surely she would rise from her grave if I took her place, and yet a place she never had, and played mother to her children—her children, whom I do not think I should love, to whom at best I should only be dutifully good, for they are not even the children of a man I love, or have ever loved, but of a man I do not love, and of a woman on whom I never set eyes.

There is another thing. You, though you love me, would want to keep a rein over me. You have ideas of a man being master, of a woman being submissive; you would want to

show me clearly at times—though there had arisen no necessity—that you were master; you would think it manly to do so. But I should hate a man who kept a rein over me; it is what the men do who are not sure of themselves, the men who feel that they must be always making signs that they are strong, lest they be suspected of weakness. It would seem to me like a jailer rattling the keys as he walked by the cells, lest the prisoners should forget that they had lost their freedom. I remember your asking me once when we were engaged if I kept an account of what I spent, of the few odd pounds a year that were allowed me, and when I said no, you said, in a firm voice that sent a thrill through me, a thrill of opposition, "You will have to do it when you are my wife, darling." It was like the flick of a whip before my eyes; it was the tone of the master who meant to have his way, to make it clearly felt that he was master, and to let no other will but his be felt within his doors. I think those words alone did much to strengthen the impossibilities. They opened a sudden vista of the future, and every bit of me rose in revolt. I should have hated the life you would have expected me to

lead: its rules and obligations, its monotony. I dreaded it even when I was only seventeen and knew nothing of the world, but now it would kill me. You think, too, that woman should keep in the background, that home life and duties should be sufficient for her, that her views of the outer world should be gained from her husband, and those views as a matter of course agree with his. You would not approve of much going out, of social success even, of individuality of any sort. This would fret and worry me. I am no strong-minded woman; I do not want to go to meetings, still less to speak at them. But I must have freedom—freedom to think and read and speak and form now my ideas, as all thinking men let their wives do now. Since John prospered so well, and gave me as his sister a place in the world, I have had what I wanted. I could not give it up to go to live in Gower street as your wife, to look after your house, to plan your quiet evening dinner, to arrange your children's lessons, let all my joys and sorrows be your shaping, submitting always my will to yours. My life, for all its dreams and ambitions, is not a happy one, has not been but—

[*Unfinished, and not sent.*]

TO THE SAME.

VI

(THE LETTER THAT WAS SENT.)

Saturday.

I HAVE had your letter, of course, and would give much if you had never written it, for I cannot answer it as you wish; and I beg you to take this as final, and to believe, as I know, that I could neither make you happy nor be happy with you. It seems so trite to say that I am your friend, but I am and truly, and pray for your happiness—but that must be found apart from me.

M. B.

VII

MADGE TO NELLIE.

Saturday Night.

I WILL answer your letter soon, not to-night, for one of my horrid moods has overtaken me. A strange thing has happened. I told you in my last letter that

James Harrison had called; that he was a widower with two children. Do you remember how shocked you looked when, a month before your marriage, I told you that my engagement was broken off, that I had never loved him? I could not make myself explain it all at the time, for one reason among others because I feared your telling Tom. You seemed to think my conduct abominable, and looked at me almost with horror; you with your just one lover, whom you loved dearly.

But no one knows what I had suffered about James Harrison, how my heart used to sink when he came, how I shrank from him, and what it is was to think of marriage with him. You did not understand how it all was then, but you shall now. Enclosed is the letter I wrote him in answer to his proposal the other day. For, in spite of my conduct, he has asked me again, after all these years, to marry him. It would be impossible to send it to him, but it will make things clear to you. He has had a decisive note a few lines long. I want you to understand me, then I shall be able to measure your love for me better, to know how strong it is, and that no

surprises can make it rock in its foundation. For two women to love each other all things must be clear and fair—there must be no mystery and nothing hidden. Between a man and a woman it is different. It does not do then, to know each other too well; some barriers should never be broken down, some things left vague and undefined—if a man's love especially is to continue.

To-morrow, perhaps, I will answer your letter, to-day I want to begin making the past clear to you. That is why I send you the impossible letter to James Harrison. It explains itself. We lost sight of each other when all things were ended between us. I shall never forget how business-like, in spite of his grief, James was in the ending; he asked for his letters and presents back, and returned mine—my letters, that is, for he had had no gifts from me. Every envelope was numbered and dated, and the last communication I had from him was a formal acknowledgement of the packet I had forwarded. Eighteen months later I heard that he was married, and, as I thought, consoled. He passed altogether out of my life. I do not think you and I ever men-

tioned his name in India. He seldom even entered my thoughts from the day I heard of his marriage; before I had hated and loathed myself for my falseness, but after he had taken a wife more repentance seemed unnecessary.

One afternoon, a month ago, a card was brought in with his name upon it. It was impossible to refuse to see him, and after all those years we met again. He had altered little. He was tall and pale as ever, thin and determined looking. There was an odd busines-like manner about him, brought from the city, I suppose, where he is a merchant. He looked prosperous, and had an air of confidence that prosperity gives, and yet I felt his hand tremble as he took mine. We sat down and looked at each other in the shy, critical manner of people who meet after long years of silence. He had heard of me through the Allens.

"I longed to see you again. You know that I lost my wife?" he said, abruptly.

"No, I didn't know it," I told him.

"I have been a widower for a year," he said, firmly, and waited a moment, and then went on. "One wants to see one's old friends again after a loss like mine."

"Oh yes, it is very natural," I answered. There was nothing sentimental in his manner any more than in his words; he did not seem in the least inclined to make love. I did not feel at all alarmed on that point; besides, I had not yet grasped the fact that he was marriageable. He told me about his wife's last illness, about his two little girls, about his house and his ambitions and plans for the future. He told me in a tone of pride that he was well off, "much better than in the old days—he had just set up a brougham."

"That is nice," I said, and took care not to let him know that John had given me one three years ago.

The talk dwindled away after a time, just as it used formerly, for James was never great at conversation. He knew but few people; he never read anything but his daily paper, and the politics he gathered from that he only talked with men; the topics of the outside world he held to be beyond the grasp of women. He asked about John, and, looking round, remarked, "This room isn't large, but the locality is pretty expensive; John must be making a fortune."

"No, not a fortune," I answered, "but he is doing well, and I am very proud of his fame."

He looked up at the last word as if he wondered what it meant. I was evident that he lived out of earshot of John's world.

"I should like some one to be proud of me," he said, after a minute, with an amused little smile, that showed he thought John's reputation a mere idea of an affectionate relation. Then, after another moment or two, he said, almost suddenly, as if it was a conclusion, and a comforting one, that he had jumped at:

"It is all professional income, I suppose. You have not come into any fortune?"

"No, we had not come into any fortune," I told him, and he seemed gratified at the intelligence. Somehow I knew that he was thinking that, in spite of John's prosperity, I was actually no better off than I had been years ago, and that this thought was a comfort to him.

"Master John will be getting married one of these fine days, I expect?" he said.

"Yes, I hope so," I answered; and he was silent for a few moments. He looked at his watch, and hesitated. There was always a little

hardness in his voice; it was very hard, yet shy, too, when he spoke again, as though he were saying something on which he had determined beforehand.

"I should like to bring my little girls to see you, if you will let me—Madge."

He half hesitated before he brought out my Christian name, but he did it firmly. Of course I said I should like to see them; what else could I say?

"I am very anxious that they should be carefully brought up," he went on. "I don't believe in teaching girls too much, unless they have to earn their living, and mine are already provided for. I have put away a good nest egg for both of them, so they are never likely to have to turn out."

He had a city way of choosing his phrases, as well as a city manner. He is a very prosperous mercantile sort of person. Intellectual pursuits are as evidently not his as a white tie or a round collar are not his. "Something in the city" is writ large all over him. Don't think that I object to this as not being fine enough. It isn't that. It is that city men—obviously city men, with their inter-

ests confined to the city—never attract me. It is not that they are not grand enough, or that I scoff at their profession—don't think that I am such a snob, dear Nell. It is merely a matter of taste. I prefer a country laborer to a city clerk; thick, muddy shoes and a slouch hat to a slim umbrella and a frock coat. I know little about men's clothes; but I hate a frock coat, and it was one of poor James's offences that he wore one.

I thought he would never go away. I dreaded vaguely what he would say next; but at last he did go, and virtually without saying anything; so I breathed freely once more, though I could not forget that he lived only a few miles off, that he was a widower, and that his matrimonial instincts had always been well developed.

Still, perhaps, after all, I thought, he would not trouble me any more. If few men really believe themselves unattractive, fewer still care to risk refusal twice from the same woman, and those who do are generally men of a different nature from James.

But he came again. He wanted to see John, he said, as an excuse for his visits; but John

was always busy in the day, and when he came home it was generally only just to dress, and perhaps pick me up for dinner and evening parties; he had no time for James Harrison. Besides, he had always found James a bore, and quite understood that but for Aunt Maria I should never have accepted him. So my old lover was allowed to drift into the tide of afternoon callers, who came and went and saw only me.

One day he asked me if I would go and see his house and children. I tried to excuse myself, and asked him to bring the children to me.

"Not till you have first been to my house to see them," he said, decisively; and I felt that if I refused some strong feeling might be roused in him, which was the last thing I wished. So I consented to go to tea one afternoon.

"And stay on to dinner, and ask John to come, too?" he suggested.

"No," I said, quickly; "I can never make engagements for John."

"Well, then, fix a day at once to come to tea," he answered, seeing that more was impossible; and from sheer helplessness I did so. I asked if I might take Annie Masters with me,

remarking that she was such a pretty girl, and thinking that it would be a blessed thing if he would fall in love with her; for she was poor, and not over discriminating, and so might take him. But, in answering my request, his voice changed and became almost passionate, though passion had never entered into James's love-making formerly. It had been more of the quiet, determined order.

"I don't want Annie Masters—or any one else but you," he said. A little fear crept into my heart. "You know that," he went on, looking at me with his large cold eyes. "Come alone. I wish it were for altogether." I said nothing, but grew distant and tried to laugh. To my relief a letter was brought in, and he became curious about that, looking at me and waiting for me to open it. He seemed to be bearing down upon me, and with fingers that almost trembled I tore the envelope off a card it inclosed—an invitation to a garden-party at Marlborough House. I put it down on the table, and, as a matter of course, he looked at it—it was so like James to do that. "Do they invite you there?" he said, with a surprise that nettled me.

"And why not?" I asked.

"I suppose it is on John's account—you say he is getting on."

"I don't see why I should not be invited on my own account," I answered haughtily.

"Perhaps H.R.H. admires you, he said, perhaps wishing to be complimentary.

"You have skill in solving difficult problems," I answered, coldly. He looked at me almost severely, then, with the air of a master, he said:

"You won't like settling down quietly—some day when you are married—after all this."

"Perhaps my husband will not require me to do so."

"Most husbands like to see their wives settle down and look after their houses like sensible women."

"Or, I may never marry," I went on, taking no notice of his interruption. He was silent, and then in a voice that obviously came from his heart, he answered,

"I hope you will, Madge."

So I went to tea in Gower street. There was a middle-aged governess with two little girls—well-behaved, white-faced children with

thin noses, and long tails of plaited dark hair hanging down their backs, just entering the house as I drove up. I pitied them instantly, they looked like puppets, of which the governess pulled the strings. The one inducement to marry James would be the chance of setting aright the lives of those children.

I wish I could describe the house to you, that well-kept, well-to-do, substantial house in Gower street—it made me shiver as a prison might. The dining-room with the big mahogany sideboard, a silver salver in the middle and water-bottle on either side; the leather-covered chairs, the prints on the wall—Martin's "Deluge" and Queen Victoria in her robes. I fancied the thick soup, the boiled codfish, the roast mutton, and apple-tart that would form the sort of dinner served there. James watched me, visibly proud of the largeness of his furniture and the dullness of the abode—I think he particularly prided himself on the dullness; it was that that added the great element of respectability to the unmistakable one of well-offness. Then he took me up into the drawing-room, a little air of triumph in his

manner. It was pathetic as well as ridiculous, for I felt that it was dawning on him that for himself I should never love him, and he was trying to bribe me with the sight of his well-to-do house into marrying him. The drawing-room, he thought, would finish me, and I tried hard to look surprised and pleased. Neat and precise, white walls hung with water-color drawings in gilt frames at equal distances; easy-chairs with white macassars looking like little shrouds on their backs; little tables about with well-bound books upon them; in the vases dried grass; here and there some Japanese fans as the sole concession to the reigning cheap and frivolous taste of the day. Over the chimney-piece there was a very large glass in a handsome gilt frame. I hated myself for not liking what he and hundreds of others, no doubt, would call a comfortable home for all one's life; but I felt that if I went to live in that house with James for my husband, and those poor little girls with whom I should not be allowed to do as I liked for my step-children, I should either go melancholy mad or commit some awful crime. Yet he looked round with all the pride of ownership, and said,

with half-shy self-congratulation, that he had got on, that he was richer than he had been in the old days in Wales.

"Do you remember," he asked, "when I told you I had just three hundred a year? Why, I thought it fairly comfortable then." He dropped his voice, though we were quite alone. The governess and the children were in the dining-room beneath seeing that the pound-cake came up with the tea, perhaps. "It is nearer three thousand now," he added—"more," he whispered.

"I am very glad," I answered; "it is so pleasant to hear of one's friends growing rich." He cleared his throat; he looked horribly nervous; he pulled out a large white handkerchief and passed it slowly along his forehead. Something like fright overtook me; I crossed the room quickly and stopped before one of the water-color drawings, blue and gray with some patches of green on it; that was all I knew it to be.

"Surely, I know that place," I said in a voice of deepest interest.

"I don't know," he answered impatiently; "it is one of poor Amy's landscapes." Poor Amy, of course, was his wife.

"Did it ever strike you that landscapes are very much alike?" I asked. "Nature has only a certain number of varieties. One bit of beach is a good deal like another bit of beach. Then there is the typical English view—fields dotted with big trees, here and there a comfortable-looking house or a picturesque cottage; perhaps there is a streamlet running through the middle, with nice little curves and vegetation and an accompanyment of low hills in the distance, that surely might be called the Englishman's own landscape, and—" I had been talking against time. Here luckily the door opened and tea was brought in, tea with thin bread-and-butter and pound-cake. The governess and children followed meekly; it was like a procession. James became almost agitated in watching the arrangement of the cups; he looked quite anxiously at the governess as she poured out the tea in a careful, precise manner that had withal an uncertainty in it. It was clear that afternoon tea in the drawing-room, perhaps afternoon tea at all in that house, was an event. James asked the governess if there ought not to have been a table-cloth (the things had been brought in on a large silver tray); he

told the children, who had looked on in awe while we drank our tea to be careful not to drop crumbs on the carpet, when finally, as a treat, they were given a bit of cake. I watched them eat that cake, those white-faced children in frills and tails; they did it solemnly, holding their plates under their chins. They behaved as if the whole business were a function—I am not sure that they did not think it had something to do with religion.

Happily for me the clock struck six. I started up, saying I must go that very moment; might I ask them to send for a hansom? I looked at the governess in a smiling but positive manner. Used to being ruled, she rose instantly and rang the bell before James had the wit to invent any excuse that would give us another minute together. The hansom was announced. I gave one child my glove to button. James offered to do it, but I shook my head, said good-bye to them all round. I would have kissed the children, but feared it might be taken as a sign of unusual interest. In another moment I was in the cab; the doors shut with a bang; my spirits rose at the sound; I nodded and laughed a good-bye at James, and in an-

other moment felt as if I were driving away from my possible tomb.

All that evening I sat and thought of Bombay, of you, of the happy days at Poona, of the long evenings when we sat in your drawing-room by the window, that opened onto the terrace with the awning over it, and talked far into the night. You were so happy then; I can see you now in your white dress, and hear you say, "Oh, Madge!" when my wild spirits carried me away. Tom's merry laugh, too; how it rings in my ears— "All over and finished, over and finished," I have said to myself many a time, wondering if it was all a dream.

There is one evening that always comes back to me when I sit and think—a long, sultry evening when we sat as usual on our low chairs round the wide-open windows, and took in the scent of the flowers, the hum of the insects, the breath of that dear summer-time. It seemed too much to bear—the stillness, the hush, the beauty; it was as though the world in dreamy rapture had stood still. I got up and walked softly about the room, peering, half doubtfully, into the dusky corners, lest some strange shadow lurked there. You called me restless,

and told me to go and play. I crossed to the piano; it stood far back at the other end, from the window, by the white-covered sofa, with the shaded lamp near it. It seems absurd, but I shall never forget that lamp-shade. It is like part of story to me; on it was painted a scene from "Faust." I sat down and played a wild gypsy dance that made one's blood tingle with excitement; it conjured up a picture of dark faces and happy laughter, of castanets and streaming ribbons. I turned and told you so, and Mark Cuthbertson—he was always there, do you remember? said, in his laughing, gibing way, that imagination was a delicious land into which idle folk with little to do retreated. I laughed and went on, all the happier for his mockery. You told me to sing, and I did—the jewel-song from "Faust"—perhaps the lamp-shade had suggested it—and then something reminded me of

"When that time steals our years away."

I began it, but could not go on, for the tears came to my eyes; they trickled down my cheeks, though in the dim light no one guessed

it. I got up and went back to you with something like despair in my heart, despair, because I was so happy, and some fiend kept whispering to me, "It will soon be over—soon be over."

It seems like a lifetime since those days, yet it is only a few years. Oh, my poor Nellie, if Death, coveting one of that happy group, had but taken me, and left your loved one with you, what a blessed thing it would have been for us both! For my world was at its brightest then. A strange happiness filled the air, and all things seemed to good to be true, too beautiful to be real. Sometimes since I have thought that there should be something in our greatest happiness that unconsciously killed, so that no sorrow followed on it, no bitterness found us more, and the happiness would be ours for all eternity, since nothing could take it from us. Is it not always twelve by the clock that stops at noon; and are not the strange eyes of the Sphinx for ever and ever open wide and staring over the great sands, though all the centuries pass and all the nations die? Oh, to have had my heart lulled with that great content in it, my lips grow cold with the laughter of happi-

ness upon them, my eyes dimmed before they had ever looked on sorrow . . . . But to go back. Mark Cuthbertson scoffed at me. He could not understand; what was there in a song to make one tremble, or in twilight to affect one? We talked of human happiness. You said it hung so entirely on human beings it could never be secure. He answered you curtly.

"Yours does, mine does not."

I could not bear to hear him say it, though why I did not know. I got up and walked about in the dim room behind us. You called me restless again, and he declared, half laughing, half serious, that it did not do to indulge in a pleasant state of feeling too long—it unnerved one afterwards; and then he wondered, perhaps on purpose, if there were any scorpions about, and we got up in alarm, for we were always in terror of them. Tom stood with his arm round your waist, thinking it was too dark to be observed, but Mark saw it, and said good-night in a voice that was half-amused, half-reproving, as though mentally he had shrugged his shoulders. But he held my hand for a moment as if he were going to say some-

thing, and then remembered we were not alone. . . .

All that night the scent of flowers filled my room. I could not sleep for thinking how good it would be to die, there on that soft night with my heart brimful of happiness I did not comprehend. . . . I get up from writing. . . . I have been lying down, living those days and nights over again. I thought them over and over that night, after the visit to Gower street, and forgot James Harrison altogether. I forgot him the next day and the next, and then there came a letter—a careful, neat letter—with an offer of marriage well set out. It was written with his best steel pen, and in his most business-like hand, but there was something in it that touched me, that went to my heart and made me hate myself for my conduct in days gone by and that showed me how much, in spite of all I had done, he loved me still. I threw it down, and, putting my face on the sofa cushion, sobbed for shame and hatred of myself, seeing clearly all I had done in the past, and knowing well I could never make amends. And all the time, Nell, all through that hour of bitter repentance, before my eyes I saw you in the drawing room

at Poona, and lived again through that night when the happiness of life had been so great that I had longed to die before the dear world round me changed and I had learned to suffer. For I *have* suffered, in the years since, bitterest pain and keenest sorrow—more than that, burning shame. I may be able to tell you; I do not know. . . . I walked up and down with James' letter in my hand, wondering what to say to him. I could not deceive him any longer, cost him and me what it would. At last I sat down and wrote him a long, long letter. Before it was half done I knew it would be impossible to send it; but still I went on and on as if for my own eyes to see written down the beginning of my own heart's history. I say the beginning, for there is more to follow, though it is far apart from James. This letter I could not send to him I send to you. It will make those long-ago days plain to you at last. I am glad it was written, since it will do this; but don't say I ought to marry him, that I owe it to him to make what reparation I can for the past—reparation by long personal sacrifice would only rouse some demon in me to do worse than I, my very own self, would do. I *could* make

reparation, though it took the form of burning agony, for a man I loved; but not to James Harrison. I am not strong enough for that, or good enough. Let him go. He will find some one better than I, who will prize the love from which I shrink; and meanwhile—but I cannot go on. I hate myself so much, and dread lest you will hate me, too, after reading this, and yet it does not tell you the worst of me.

M.

VIII

TO SIR NOEL FRANKS

DEAR SIR NOEL,—Thank you for the lovely flowers. I have been arranging them in the Indian pots you admired.

I am sorry we did not get to the Bullers, but we were so tired after a very long dinner that we came home instead of going on anywhere else. Perhaps we shall meet at the Geographical Society on Wednesday. I hope you will not be too learned for ordinary capacities,

Yours sincerely,

MADGE BROOKE.

IX

TO MRS. HAMILTON.

Wednesday.

DEAREST NELLIE,—you are right. Mark Cuthbertson—he is the key to my history.

I wish I had never seen him, for in some strange way, though I do not know whether I hate or love him now, he dominates everything I do or say. He is never wholly out of my thoughts, and yet it is possible that we may never even meet again. I will tell you about him from the beginning as clearly and coherently as I can.

It is a difficult story to relate, but it will be a relief to write it out, as it was a relief to write that long letter to James Harrison—the letter that never went.

Mark came to Daffodil one vacation with John, years ago when I was a little girl. Probably you do not remember—I think you were away, or else we did not see each other often in those days. He was eighteen and I ten and to me he was a grown man. He romped and played with me, and was the best com-

panion in the world. I cried the day he went away, though I soon forgot him. He never came again. He passed wholly out of my life till John and I went to India. We landed at Bombay, and the first person we met was Mark Cuthbertson. He was artist to an illustrated paper, as you know. I can recall the expression of his face, the tone of his voice, his first words as well as if it were but yesterday. John had vanished for a moment, and I was alone, strange and awkward. Suddenly a tall, rather handsome man came up to me—

"Surely you are—" I think he was going to say Miss Brooke, for he hesitated, and then, as if the idea of such formality were absurd, he added quickly, with a smile, "Madge?" He said it as though he had expected I should understand that he had been waiting for me. In some vague way I did understand; in some strange, helpless manner I saw for a moment into the future, a misty view that vanished and left me silent and afraid, but I did not know why or of what. Then the old habit returned, the habit of accepting life as it comes—and at the moment, he was life—life with the memory of a past in which we had been good friends and

easy comrades. "You don't mean that you have forgotten me?" he asked. "I am Mark Cuthbertson; don't you remember what fun we had at Daffodil when you were a little girl? I knew you were coming by this boat. Where is Jack?" It was so that it all began.

He was always with me in Bombay just as he was in Poona. He came every day, all day, half the night. There was in his being with us a naturalness, a matter-of-courseness, that admitted of no question. He and John were the dearest friends in the world—had been all their lives; were brothers in all but name. It would have been strange, especially after their long parting, if they had not been together as much as possible, and when John had to go off farther about the railway, and I was left with you at Poona, I think it was a comfort to him that Mark was near and able to look after me. You liked him, your husband did, we all did. Do you remember how thoroughly he did as he chose with us all, though we could none of us do as we chose with him, or put a single social shackle on him, and how handsome he was in those days, how unconventional and different from most of the men who hung about us?

Poona is a dangerously fascinating place, dear Nell. Perhaps it is the mangoes, the wonderful profusion of roses, the lake, the determination of every one to get all the enjoyment possible out of the surroundings. I do not know, but life there is not a matter of work, of thought, of study, but rather of beauty, of happiness, of innocence and enjoyment of living. Don't you think so? I did not then, but insensibly I felt it; and that was more dangerous than thinking it and being awake. You were taken up at that time with your own life, with Tom, with your baby, with all that belongs to life's happiness, so that you did not notice what was going on with me, and something held my lips fast. There was nothing to conceal, but it was impossible to talk to Mark. The beginning of my madness was on me, I suppose. He and I together only talked of books and politics and pictures, mostly of pictures and of subjects for them, and of music—the usual talk of people in our position thrown much with each other. Sentiment we never talked; he told me that he was poor; that he did not believe in love; that he had a dread of matrimony; that he did not

care much for human beings, though he was fond of John. Women, I learned instinctively, he did not believe in—he liked to look at pretty faces, but he did not trust them; he was not able, as a rule, to make a woman his friend. He thought women inferior to men, that they should be in subjection to them, should give way to them, should be content with their own part in the world—and their part was first to be pretty and submissive and charming, and then as they grow older to be drudges, or if not exactly that, to look after home, to mother children, and leave the rest of life to the stronger sex. His views regarding women were a good deal like James Harrison's. Only the one man had a world of power over me, and the other had none; one was clever and fascinating, and one was not; from one the least control in the world was not to be borne, and from the other it was sweetness not to be described. I was at the age when masterfulness in a man strikes a woman as manliness, and gives him at once a hold upon her. Now that I am older and see clearly, I know well enough how to measure the strength of the masterful man—it does not take long. I know his inward grudg-

ingness towards women, his shallowness, his unconscious fear of being found out. Yet even now I believe I could bend my neck thankfully to be Mark's slave, and think the slavery sweetest life. I loathe myself for it, but it is so, dear Nell.

He gave me some lessons in sketching; it is always a dangerous thing to take lessons in anything from a fascinating man, and in sketching out-of-doors with the mangoes shading us and the rose-breath filling the air, and the sunshine and the blue sky and the delicious sense of nature at her highest noon that India always gives—what else could one of two at least do but fall in love? We took long rides together, too, for I sat badly, and he wanted to improve me, so we sauntered and cantered beside the lake that seemed to be forever conscious of its own beauty, and rejoicing beneath the heavenly blue it reflected. He hung about me always, and controlled me altogether, and I rejoiced, as a woman always does, in being controlled by a clever man; even you saw enough of him to know that he was clever, though he was too indolent to gain the success that was his due. John was devoted

to him, and often while we were at Bombay sat up far into the night talking with him. He talked well on most subjects, and had an original way of looking at things, a pleasant cynicism, a carelessness about the emotional side of life, though he awoke it in all about him, that fascinated me entirely.

John was delighted that Mark and I were good companions. He had a boundless belief in his friend, and thought it an excellent thing that there in India a man older than myself—he was seven-and-twenty—clever, and so on, should in a brotherly fashion look after me. He knew that Mark had not love-making or matrimony in his mind, though if it had been otherwise he would, I think, have been glad enough. John himself has always been much more taken up with the intellectual than the human side of life, and he forgets how much the majority of people concern themselves about the latter. Dear old John! He has never been in love yet, save with you when you were ten, dear Nell. I hope he will one day love some dear woman who will understand how true and great a heart she has won.

But do you understand now how my relations

with Mark came about, how easily things drifted ? It was a happy time for me ; a strange new life, and before it there seemed to be a happy, hazy future. But what had I to do with that ? The present was sufficient ; I troubled about nothing, but just took the days as they came ; and all were spent with him, or were full of thoughts of him. So it was that, without any love-making, without a single word that my heart could lay hold of, we yet grew very close indeed, and seemed unable to live apart.

Once I made him angry, for our relations were distinct enough in a way. He was autocrat, and I obeyed him. It seemed natural when I remembered that, years ago at Daffodil, he had only played with me on condition that I was good. I offended him that afternoon at Bombay. I forget why ; but he did not come near me again. And the next day, when he dropped in at breakfast-time to show John a series of sketches he had made, he hardly spoke to me. It nearly broke my heart. In his sight and in John's I held my head high, but secretly I wept floods of tears. It seemed as if the world was at an end.

That evening, the evening of the day on which he had shown the sketches to John, there was a ball at General Durham's. I wore a white dress; I put white flowers in my hair. I knew that my face was white, too, and my heart was a load too heavy for mortal woman to carry. I stood by John's side watching the dancers. He went off with his partner and left me alone. I saw you in the midst of a group at the far end of the room, but could not drag myself to you. Some one asked me to dance—two or three did—but I shook my head and sat still and cold and sad in the corner in which John had left me. Strange cords in my heart vibrated to the music, the lights blinded me. I felt like a woman slowly turning to stone. Above me there seemed to be a heavy cloud in which was the whole weight of the dreary heaven. It was coming down—down on my head. Soon I should fall beneath it, crushed, yet still I sat blankly staring at the ball-room, and as I hoped making no sign of the deadening that was going on within me. All this, Nell, and yet I give you my word that I did not know it was love. It is long before a girl, and a simple one, as I was then—

though I had already treated one lover badly, and could remember the protestations of others since my arrival in India—lets herself know what her malady is; long enough before she dares say to herself, "I love him." Though her heart beats quickly when she hears a step, and all the wide world changes at the sound of a voice, she remains a mystery, a secret from herself, a creature of new aches and joys and indefinite longings till he speaks, till he bids her awake to a new life and be blessed in it, or until some shock makes her understand.

Suddenly, for I did not see him coming, Mark was before me.

"What is the matter?" he asked. "You are not dancing?"

"No, I cannot; I am tired," I answered. He looked at me wonderingly.

"Let us go into the garden," he said; "we shall be alone there."

With a long sigh of relief, I put my arm through his, and without another word we left the ball-room. The garden was deserted. There was a long winding pathway, thick with flowers and palms on either side, and then, of course, the inevitable mango grove. We went

towards it. The air was still and overladen with perfume; the ground was strewn with petals from the rose-bushes. The darkness seemed to have gathered with strange intensity into corners and beneath trees. The light from the ball-room did not reach us, but we saw each other's faces clearly against a background of dim foliage. We went up and down beneath the mangoes without a word. It seemed at first as if we must each think silently, and to speak would be impossible. At last he turned and asked me half mockingly.

"Have we made it up?"

I could not answer, but just nodded my head, and we went on again in silence. Then all at once he stopped, under a lamp that twinkled by a sort of summer-house, and looked at me, at my face, at my trembling hands, and slowly down at my white dress and the white flowers already drooping. "I don't know what you have done to yourself," he said in a low tone, more to himself than to me, "but you are quite beautiful to-night." It sent a thrill of joy through me; it was compensation for all the weary hours. I never dreamed of his thinking

me beautiful, of his even looking at me at all. No words can say how much I thought of him, how little I thought of myself. "We won't quarrel any more," he said. "It is too foolish;" and we turned towards the mangoes again. But the silence was sweet enough now, and all the world had changed. Behind every dark corner there hid some strange secret, for the joy of which I was not yet ready. Overhead the sky had lifted, the weight had gone from my heart, and instead there had fallen on it a great content—it was like drinking in life when life had nearly gone. All at once I slipped, and should have fallen, but that he pulled me up and held me firmly. He tried as he did so to see into my eyes, but I could not raise them even in that dim light.

"You were nearly down," he said, tenderly; "What were you thinking of—our quarrel?"

"Yes," I answered, helplessly," I am so sorry—"

"We will never be foolish again," he whispered, and held me in his arms for half a moment and kissed me; "we will be much wiser." He spoke as if all our lives we were going to be together. I could not be angry at

what he had done, or resent it; all power to guide myself seemed to have gone. Everything had changed, it was as though we had entered another world out there in the Indian garden. Behind us the gates of the old world had shut, and in the new one there walked only one man and one woman—he and I.

He grew colder after that night, more guarded in his manner, I thought it was, because he was ashamed, as I was; but looking back now by the light of after years I understand. He tried to impress on me more clearly than before that he had no intention of marrying. But what was that, or what was anything in the future to me? I cared for nothing but that most happy present, and could not look beyond it.

When we left India he managed to get sent to Malta; it was just when the Indian troops were going there, and all Europe's eyes were turned in that direction. He went by our ship, and for those long days at sea we were thrown together with the completeness that only happens on board ship. I do not know, Nell—into another's heart one cannot see—but I think he did love me then—he could not keep

away from me; oh, he must have loved me, Nellie; I know he did then and in the dear months afterwards, and if I lost him, it was my fault and mine only. I am glad it came into my heart—the great love; the overwhelming blind passion that did come for him later; the price has been hard to pay; the years long and bitter since, but life without it would have been a dull and sorry play. For all its folly, all its mistakes, all its sin, I would not have missed my life to be a saint in heaven.

I think it dawned on John while we were on board the *Deccan* that Mark and I were fond of each other; but he looked surprised when nothing came of it, and he used to watch me narrowly with a half-puzzled manner. Then he evidently concluded it was only friendship, and, having so arranged it in his mind, went back to his own work and was blind enough for long to come.

At Malta we left Mark and came on alone. I remember the keen pain of parting—pain that was sweet enough, for it showed us how much we were to each other; but it seemed as if lives so closely bound as ours could never wholly be apart again. I do not think they can be, either—I

feel that still—though it is getting to be years since I saw his face. He gave me a long, long look as he said good-bye. "We will meet in England, dear," he said. He had never called me dear before. I remembered that all the way home, and again and again in my heart listened to the tone of his voice as he said it—all the way home, the way that took me farther and farther from him, and from the happiest days of my whole life. In some frightened way I knew then what had happened to me, knew that I loved him, that he was life of my life—as he is still, Nell, and will be always, bitter or sweet, greatest pain or greatest joy, but still very life of life till death draws down the curtain and the lights are all put out.

Oh, Nell, what a sentimental fool I am, and how I love him even now—save when I hate and loathe and scorn him!

You shall have the rest, but not to-day. It is more difficult to explain—to excuse.

Jack often speaks of you, dear. I wish you could come for a bit and stay with us.

MADGE.

X

TO THE SAME.

Saturday.

YES, I will go on, dear Nell Mark wrote constantly from Malta. I only lived from letter to letter, though there were no protestations in them, no words of endearment; they might have been sent to a sister, or to any friend he knew well. Yet the morning that brought me one made the whole day a festival. How well James Harrison has been avenged if he did but know it!

At first John was curious about Mark's letters, but when he had seen one or two he was satisfied. He did not suspect a love affair because a man and woman were moderately intimate. From his point of view, too, Mark was a sort of other brother to me, and that he might be anything else from mine did not occur to him after his suspicions at Malta had passed. Besides, for all his cleverness, John is very simple, and never suspects people of living lives of which they give no account to those immediately about

them; and this is the key to his conduct throughout.

In October, Mark came back, and then we had things all our own way. He had determined to give up most of his illustrating, to take a studio, and do serious work. There were many historical subjects he wanted to paint. His pictures always had historical or literary, but never a sentimental interest. This was, I think, because the last would have given a certain importance to women, and he looked on women as an inferior type of humanity, not worth the serious attention often given them. I told you this in my last letter, and I want to impress it upon you, for I think it explains him, and perhaps accounts for his conduct to me. He is very passionate and cannot help being attracted by freshness and prettiness, but of higher love for a woman he is incapable. He liked me because I was pretty, and twenty. When the effect of that had worn off he left me. He would talk of outside things with me, but nothing I said regarding them, or that any woman said, had weight with him. He cannot feel it possible that women ever really influence the intellectual lives of men, though he thinks it well that they

should know how to talk a certain amount of educated small talk—it makes them more amusing while their charm lasts. Still, talk as well as they will, there is no opinion they express on which he does not think man should firmly put his foot in the long run. For man is woman's master, and it is only while she is new and fresh to him that she is to be humored, to have her ways and whims considered, to be flattered and caressed. She is of no account at all afterwards; she may be allowed to live in the world, but that is all. This is the man I have loved, Nell; the man for whom I have spoiled my life, and made most things on which a woman builds her dearest hopes impossible.

But to go on. Mark came back and took a studio. It belonged to a cousin of his, Mrs. Berry, a widow with grown-up children; it was at the end of a long garden, away from the house in which she lived, and had a separate entrance at the back, so that his comings and goings and visitors were quite unknown to her. He would not have taken it had it been otherwise; for he hated being commented on in any way. He disliked relations, too, and told me once that it did not "do

to be intimate with them, they always interfered with you."

The Berrys were kindly people, generally anxious about money matters; and Mrs. Berry always had in her mind the placing out in the world of her many sons, for whom Mark had a sort of secret contempt, chiefly because they were so tall and pale and speechless. The worst of them all was that they thought it showed discrimination of character to criticise people, finding a moderate amount of fault, so that while you were with them you always had the feeling that you would be discussed when you had gone. Mark had once lived with them, and knew them well. He had no other relations, I think; perhaps this was why John and he drew so close as boys, and when they were both men the sentiment of youth kept them together. There was little else in common between them, though it was years before they realized this.

I shall never forget the happy morning when Mark came back. He came to us the very hour he arrived. It was breakfast time, and John was at home, so he did not talk much to me, but the look in his eyes was enough, and the tone in which he said, "And Madge?" when

he let go John's hand to grasp mine, made my heart leap for joy. He was handsomer than ever, full of life and fun; no words could describe his attraction. You remember what he was in India, and can surely understand my infatuation. There was about him a daring, a strength, a generosity in unexpected ways, a certain happy, careless courtesy that carried all before him. It maddens me to think of him. Sometimes I feel that he is—that he must be everything good and true and manly. Perhaps there was in my nature that which brought out all the worst possibilities in his; or he may have misconstrued something I said and did, and judged me by it; or perhaps the Berrys, whom I knew well later on, unwittingly made remarks that gave him a wrong conception of me; and yet he knew me long before they did.

He was in wonderful spirits, full of his studio, of pictures he was going to paint, of books we must both read, of John's work, of politics, of everything that was going on in the world. That was a part of his great charm, he was so thoroughly alive, right down to his finger tips, for all his air of indolence and leisure. He seemed to know every-

thing that was in the air long before others talked of it; I used to look at him sometimes, and think that he was a part of the universe, and in touch with the whole of it.

You will wonder at my alternations of feeling, but by them you must measure alike the joy he gave me and the sorrow and bitterness he cost me. In that clear, gray October that brought him back, the world was filled with a new life that intoxicated me, till I hardly knew right from wrong, or black from white, or anything at all save that every day I saw his face and heard his voice; to-day, and to-morrow, and for endless to-morrows, I thought the story would be the same.

"I shall take Madge in hand," he said to John; "she draws very well, and would paint well, too, if she would only work. We must make her."

At first he tried to come only when John was at home, but this could not go on if we were to work together; for John had an office at Westminster, and went to it regularly an hour after breakfast, and did not return till nearly dinner-time. All day long I was left to my own devices, and there was no one (except Aunt

Maria, who was at Daffodil) to tell me the conventional things I ought to do, the unconventional thing I ought not to do, lest the world should put a false construction on them.

Well, Mark used to come in the morning after John had gone, and we went into the little box-room I called my study, to paint, and there was no one to disturb us. I do not think John realized how much we were together—I never told him; something kept my lips closed, though, mind, had it occured to him to ask me, I should have told him. I do not suppose he would have objected, for he was devoted to Mark.

We really worked at first; I think Mark had made up his mind not to make love to me, so that no idea of wrong entered my head, and I gave myself up to the happiness of life. But gradually things altered; we might be friends and artists, but we were man and woman, too, and it was not given to us to be different from the rest of humanity. Do people, when they are young and full of life and happiness, with most of the world's unknowns before them, go on spending long days together, week after week for merely work and talk of work? Not often.

I think we struggle with Fate or Nature—call it which you will—and tried to keep up the old relations as long as possible. We tried to work steadily, but the brushes were too often laid aside; we had so much to say. We talked of ourselves; we were jealous and curious; we looked at each other long and often, and then were half ashamed; our hands met, and all our souls knew it. The tone of his voice, the sound of his step, the sight of his face, how much they were to me! I counted the last moments before he came, they were so long in going; the last before he went, they seemed to fly while we lingered over our parting words. It could not go on long—it did not.

"It is very difficult to paint in this little hole," he said one afternoon, when we went back to our work after lunch; "we want a studio to ourselves," he laughed.

"How lovely it would be," I answered. "I have never even been inside a real studio. I should so like to see one."

"To see a studio? Put on your things and come and see mine; it is better than a box-room. I have wanted you to see it; we shall never work here."

I hesitated.

"Make haste," he said. "Then perhaps we shall be able to do a little there before it is too dark."

"Do you think I really might go?" I asked, doubtfully.

"Of course," he answered; "why not? Every one goes to studios. Besides, it is in the Berry's garden. We will have tea with them before we leave."

That set all doubts at rest. I went to put on my hat, and started at my own face when I beheld it in the glass. Love had changed it till it was almost beautiful. He thought so too; I could see that when he looked silently and half-wonderingly at me in the one moment before we left the house. Perhaps he divined in that moment all that was going on in my heart. What did it matter? Had he not kissed me long since under the mango-trees at Poona? Would he have done it had he not loved me, had he not known that I loved him back? All things are not said in words, some are told in a language that has no sound for ears to hear.

We jumped into a hansom and drove to Grove End Road. I could have sung for joy as

I went along, but that all the time I listened—to what? Nellie, do you know how the rattle of a train, the wheels of a carriage, the thud-thud of a steamer will sometimes keep time to a song that no lips sing, only your own joyous heart on some few blessed times in your life? As we went along every sound kept time to a silent song in my heart: "Happiest in the world, there's no one like him, no one at all—happiest in the world," the wheels ground out as they went round and round. I looked at the people we passed, and they looked back at me as if they knew how happy I was, as if they knew that I was with my lover. We sped on swiftly. What a gay and happy place was London; even on a drear October day like that the streets were full of busy people, the very air seemed full of life. How wonderful it was to be a girl, to be beside Mark and going to his studio! Oh, my dear, my dear who was all the world to me! I looked at his face shyly, and he laughed—for happiness, it seemed; did he, too, catch the burden of the song that all things sang to me? On we whirled; gray was the sky overhead, sombre the dress of the passing folk, brown the London roads, ugly the cabs and omnibuses,

heavy and slow the lumbering carts ; what did it matter, for at last I tasted the draught of joy that love held to my lips—tasted, and all things were made beautiful ? I was so proud of loving him, thankful that it was my lot to do so, for was he not best in the world, wisest and cleverest ? And good ? Oh yes, good, too ; he was too grand, too wonderful altogether in my girlish eyes to be anything else. Fool that I was, dear Nell, for I knew nothing. To him all things were known, to me all unknown. I was asleep, but he was awake. Sometimes I wonder if secretly that day he scorned me because I loved him, because I trusted him. Trusted him ! I would have staked my life that every word he said was true, and every look an index of his heart. It never once entered into my mind—how should it ?—that all the time a self of which I knew nothing, thought and drew conclusions and managed him—a self totally different from the one he showed me.

We stopped at last by a garden door behind Grove End Road—not at the Berry's house, but at the studio at the far end of their garden. We could not see the house for the thick trees between. I jumped down quickly, the excite-

ment was flashing from my eyes and burning on my cheeks, and made me almost dumb. It seemed as if I was about to pass into his life for a space, to see his work, the surroundings among which he spent his time, the things that suggested thoughts to him and made him work, made him known to the great world beyond our two selves—the world that would one day speak of him as a master. What an idealist is a girl, dear Nellie, and what strange dreams are sometimes dreamed behind the most innocent eyes in the world!

Mark paid the cabman, and still with the smile on his lips and the happy look that had come into his eyes since we started, fumbled in his pocket for a key with which he opened the door of the studio. I entered, but stopped on the threshold. All was silent, dim and cold—waiting for us.

"Come in," he said, pulling back a blind that had been drawn over the high north window. But still I waited by the door. Everything looked cold and comfortless, as though the whole place had been asleep and did not realize yet that it was time to awake—that we had come, and there was some life to live

through; a chapter in two people's history for the walls to listen to and look down upon. He stood for a minute watching the effect of the keen gray light coming in, and then turned to me with a sigh of relief: "I have always wanted to see you here," he said, "and now you have come. But why do you stand there, my child?" I shivered with cold, with the silence, and could not speak. He came over to me; he took my hand and led me farther into the room. "I have often thought how well we could paint here. In the future it shall be our workshop, and we will astonish the world, eh?" His voice was a lover's voice, my heart knew that well enough, and in its tone there was a confidence and tenderness that might well have set my fears at rest. But still I was half-afraid—of what? God knew, perhaps, but I did not.

You will wonder that I remember it all so keenly, but I do not think that I forgot one word he ever said to me. Even his letters stay with me. I burned them long ago in bitter passionate scorn, but I could say them all by heart.

With my hand in his, as if to gain courage, I look round the studio again; it was large and

picturesque, and full of the properties in which painters delight: armor and draperies, old cabinets and strange-shaped pots, tall palms and low, roomy bamboo chairs. He followed my gaze. "These fripperies are not mine, he explained, "they belong to a man who had the studio before me. He is abroad now, but I told him I would take charge of them till he came back." I shivered again with the gloom and cold, perhaps, and with a certain sense of strangeness. "Why, you are cold," he said, "you are shivering; wait, we will soon alter that;" and he went to a little ebony elephant on a shelf, and taking a match from its back, set light to the wood-fire ready laid in the big fireplace. Then he drew up two of the low chairs, that brought back with a rush memories of your room at Poona, and put them before the logs that almost in a minute were blazing. "Let us sit down and get warm," he said; "old ship's wood always burns well and crackles and makes blue flame. Don't you like watching it?"

"Yes," I answered; "I like to watch it sometimes—"

"It makes one think of great seas and storms

and drowning crews on helpless ships," he went on. Then suddenly he asked, "And what do you think of the studio?"

"It is lovely, but—"

"Then let us sit and talk while the fire blazes —you are cold enough."

"But we came to work," I pleaded; "let us begin before the daylight goes."

"We shall have lots of time to work here," he answered; "we can come every day if we like; sit down now and let us take quietly our first hour here together."

Helplessly I did as he told me. He walked up and down looking at the room and then at me. I knew vaguely, as I sat there with my hands crossed on my lap and my head resting against the great silk cushion on the chair back, that he was going to make love to me, and my heart stood still, and I was afraid—of what? Of some unknown wrong that against my own will I seemed to be doing. But I was not wholly passive. In a blindfold way I struggled with the fate that seemed to be bearing down on me.

"This room suits you," he said; "it makes just the right background for your coloring.

You look as you did that night at Poona—in the garden. Do you remember our quarrel, and how we made it up?"

I was indignant with him for reminding me of it.

"Please let us talk of something else—let us talk about the studio and what we will paint here."

"We need not settle that now; we can paint together all our lives." He spoke as if we were never going to be apart. Do you wonder that gradually I let go, and forgot all things but my love for him, and his—his desire to be with me that I mistook for love?

"All our lives?" I said, vaguely.

"Why, yes, my child; so we can afford to watch the ship-wood crackle now."

But still I could not shake off the feeling that it was wrong to be there, and somehow, I felt like a prisoner. Suddenly he stopped behind my chair, he leaned down, I knew that he was softly touching my hair with his lips. That roused me; quickly I stood up, and facing him took my courage into my two hands.

"Mark," I cried, "let us go home, or let us go to the house and see Mrs. Berry. No one

knows that I am here—John does not—here all alone with you, and as it were in secret. It feels wrong, I don't know why, but it does." I finished almost piteously, for the expression on his face sent a chill to my heart. It had grown cold and hard and surprised. All my life was bound up in him—I would have died rather than make him angry. I could have borne anything better than his coldness.

"Why is it wrong?" he asked.

"I don't know, but I feel that it is."

"Don't be silly, dear," he said, gently. "How can it be wrong to be here with me? You are not a child; you are a woman, and we know what we are about. Why should we not be here together?—two people who like each other."

"I don't know," I faltered again.

"Neither do I," he answered, and put his arms round me lovingly, but I recoiled almost with a shudder.

"Ah! you do not care for me," he said, scornfully; "if you did you would not shrink from me."

"Oh! but if Jack knew—"

"But Jack does not know," he said; "don't

be silly, Madge; I hate women who are forever thinking of the proprieties; your cautious woman, always wondering which is right and which is wrong and doing neither, is contemptible." He had not let go, but he held me a little way off and looked steadily and coldly into my face. The hot tears came to my eyes and burned them.

"You are cruel to me; you will kill me," I almost sobbed, "if you say such wicked things."

"You provoke them. You are not like the girl I knew in India."

"I am the same, Mark. I am the same," I cried.

"I think she cared for me," he said, in a low voice; "you do not?"

"I do," I gasped, "I do."

"Not much?" he said, curiously, in the same cold tone. Looking back, I think he was deliberately informing himself of my feeling towards him—though he must have known it well before—while he took care not to compromise himself. "Not much?" he repeated. I clasped my hands; I could not endure his manner any longer; a strange despair settled on my heart; a dread lest he should suddenly hate me unless he knew the truth.

"Oh, yes," I said; "much, much—I care dreadfully," and then for a little while there swept over me the rest and perfect happiness that follows always, I suppose, on a confession like that. With those words said, was not I at his mercy, Nell? I was, and he knew it; but though he kissed me a hundred times he did not say that he loved me; he did not ask me to marry him. Yet I was his friend's sister; he had known me since I was a little girl, and unknowingly I had felt that old acquaintance in itself a safeguard, a reason why, no matter into what new phases of emotion he might lead me, he would let me do no real wrong. Was this so strange, dear Nell? Was I so old and worldly-wise that I should know already that a woman should forever be on the defensive, ever sophisticated, ever holding back and hiding what she feels, though a man may say and do what he will, and scarce be blamed at all. For man is strong, and so shall go scott-free; but woman is weak, and well shall man scout and scorn her if just for love of him she shows her weakness. So is the game played in this strange world of ours.

We sat by the wood-fire till the twilight

came, till the twilight went and the darkness gathered; he with his chair close to mine, my lover one minute, my half-scornful master the next. At last the fire died out, the air grew chill, and the striking of the quaint old clock in the corner vibrated as though the room were empty, as though it felt the stillness. The day had come to an end; we had sat beside the fire all the hours through; they had slipped away as our dreams slip back when at last we face the waking-time.

"It is too late to see Clara Berry to-day, but we shall have plenty of time for that," he said; and then we walked home in silence, I, shy and afraid, and he—I do not know.

But there was nothing to tell John, no engagement, no confession; for it was not possible to tell him that my whole heart was given to a man who had not even said he loved me.

That was but the beginning of many days—long days at the studio, long walks to and fro, and talks by the fire as the light grew gray and the wood burned and crackled—wood that had seen shipwreck once, and now blazed out and left but darkness behind as I walked through

my Eden towards the gate that leads outward. We were lovers in all but name—what did the name matter? He loved me, surely, I thought; would he spend his life with me thus; would he caress me and scold me and forgive me—for we had many foolish quarrels and makings up; would he make me so happy and so miserable, would he take my whole life into his hands if he did not love me? But he never once said it. I thought the omission only an accident, and due to the fact that he was not given to making protestations. I know now that it was cold wisdom. He did not mind putting shame and reproach into a girl's life, but he was careful not to commit himself.

How you must despise me, Nell; and the story is not finished yet. Perhaps even though you despise me you will love me a little still. God grant you may, dear, and that with you at least my soul may walk in the light of day.

MADGE.

XI.

THE SAME TO THE SAME.

HOW glad I shall be when I have brought things up to date! It is so long since the days I am telling you of, and relating them humiliates me more than I can bear. Since those days, too, I have changed. I won my spurs in the world. I know my power, and if I could only forget I could be content. "Love is not all," I say to myself in these days; there are many things besides—ambition, for instance, and power. To help to make the wide world's history, to see the beginnings of great movements, the birth of new ideas, the gradual development of some strange theory that shall unhinge doors that have been closed for centuries, and set them open wide—are not these better than love? Love is for the individual—a short and fevered happiness for one, at most for two; is it not foolish to stake our lives upon it? Other things may affect the whole world, but love is just for our own hearts. Be it what it will, love is for me no more—it is forever beyond my reach, and so I cultivate fine feelings and big thoughts, and

try to find some satisfaction in them. It is a trick known to many of us, though each one, as he learns it, tries to hide its trickiness and to pass it off almost as a religion. Nell, I have played my part so well these last years that I pass for a cold and rather clever woman, ambitious and severe, wholly above emotional phases. Lovers come to me still, but they are half afraid of me; though middle-aged men like Sir Noel Franks consider me favorably. I sit alone, sometimes, and laugh in my sleeve or cry in it —it matters little which—when I think of my present pose and of the days that I remember.

But to my story. Dear, this is like a novel for you. Each letter is an installment. I shall put "to be continued" at the end of this if I do not finish to-day.

Well.

At the end of the winter, of which I told you in my last, Janet came to live with us. She was our dear mother's maid years and years ago, before we were confided to Aunt Maria's care at Daffodil; and being a widow, came back to us again, and has been with us ever since. She looks after everything here, and is the great comfort of my life. She has known us

both ever since we were born, and is more like a dear friend than a servant. John was glad to give her a home. He thought she would take care of me; and she has done so. Soon after she came, John was asked to go to Canada for some months. He was to be away from April to October, and then for the first time he seemed to consider my position and to realize that at one-and-twenty I was not old enough to live alone in London with only Janet to look after me, and with Mark for my guide, philosopher, and friend. He knew I should hate going to Daffodil, and did not venture to propose it. One day he saw an advertisement of a tiny cottage to be let on the river, near Cookham. It was the very thing, he declared, when he came back from seeing it; there was a boat, a summer-house, a long garden, and room enough in the house for me and Janet, and one servant besides.

"You can be happy there, dear Madge," he added; "you will have your books to read and the garden for a studio."

"May Mark come?" I asked, for my heart was sinking.

"He may go down and see you for a few

hours in the course of the summer," he answered; "but he must not go and stay with you, remember; after all, Mark is no relation" — He stopped and looked at me, and I knew it was because my face was turning white with dismay. Even then, though I did not know it, I felt the cruelty of Mark's conduct as I stood tongue-tied before my brother. "Why, Madge, dear, what is the matter? you are quite pale, and there are tears in your eyes."

"Let me stay in town," I pleaded, "I don't want to go away. It will be so lonely."

"You shall stay if you will have some of the Daffodil people with you." That was enough. I agreed to the cottage.

So John went to Canada, but first he had a long talk with Mark. I do not know what it was about, but for some time afterwards the latter was almost distant. I was distracted—he did not love me any more; it was all over, and I should break my heart. I only lived for him in those wild days—he was all my world. I think of it now sometimes when I look at John's dear face and see the furrows that work and thought have left there, and hate myself for my own selfishness.

John in his simplicity thought he had put some distance between Mark and me. He had only made things more easy. Janet and I in that little house, with the wood in front and the river behind, the old-fashioned garden, the summer-house, the boat in its little shelter, a basket-carriage at the inn close by—is not the rest easy to imagine?

At first he wrote regularly twice a week. I wrote to him every day, but every other letter I burned. I longed to see him, to ask him to come, but dared not, and he said no word. The hours dragged by without him—they were so empty, so long, so useless, the river was chilly, the roads were dreary. I could not work, for nothing in the world was worth painting; or read, for my thoughts would not fasten on a book.

One afternoon I sat in the summer-house rolled in a shawl (it was cold, uncertain April) listening for the postman's step. Twice a day he came, and when the second letters were delivered I felt as if there was nothing to do but to wait as best one could till the morning. I used to watch and wait for a letter, Nellie, as though it fell from

heaven, bringing a message of its bliss, and the sight of one of the long envelopes with the embossed stamp that Mark always used sent a thrill of joy through me that was almost pain.

Presently, instead of the postman's step there was another. I knew it well enough, and started to my feet. Of course it was Mark. He laughed for joy when he saw the color come to my face.

"I have brought my things," he said, and am going to stay at the Swan for a bit; I thought we might do some work together." I clasped my hands and could not speak for a moment; there was no need—he understood.

And then in the days that followed I felt as if the whole universe sang for joy just because we were together; just because of my great happiness. It did not seem possible that the world could any longer hold sorrow or pain. And the cities and the peoples—they had all vanished, gone to the earth's far corners or on to heaven perhaps; but we were there among the trees, beside the river, free and alone in the beautiful world together. Together—together all through the bright spring days, all through the sultry summer, till the first cold winds of autumn

came and swept before them many things. I shiver as I remember these last. But the dusky evenings, the rustle of the leaves, the notes of the birds hidden among them—notes that seemed to come from their soft throats that were as full of joy as was my heart—the ripple of the river, the yellow of the merigold, the scent of the roses, how they all come back to me as I sit here and write at the end of the story.

We spent whole days upon the river, starting in the early morning, taking our luncheon with us, putting up under a tree to eat it or landing upon some little island covered with trees and short, thick underwood. We made a picnic of our own, the chicken and the fruit and the cakes that Janet had put up for us, the claret and the cold black coffee. How like Eden it was! —Eden that had heard just enough of the outside world to gather in its comforts.

After we had finished our gay little meal he smoked, and we sat close together watching our boat tied up, and talked and dawdled through the summer hours, making plans for the future or speculating idly how we would have a house-boat here or a wigwam there, and forever keep

away from the haunts of men. Did it seem as if we should ever be apart?

Once, nay, many times, I said: "Oh, if Jack only knew that you were here, then I could be content. Now I am afraid of his being angry;" but he always answered impatiently:

"What nonsense; you have a right to do as you like; besides, why should John be angry?" Or I tried to make our relations more formal, and would not let him walk through the woods with his arm round my waist, but he only looked at me in surprise.

"Two people who like each other and are together, surely there is nothing wrong in this?" he said.

That was the nearest approach to a declaration he ever made me, and yet in everything but words he was my devoted lover. Do you wonder that I was lulled, that I gave up my whole life to him without disguise and trusted him absolutely? If the question had arisen I should have said, "Of course he loves me." There was no necessity for words.

Nell, how cruel it was, for he knew, though I did not. He was careful and cautious, though I had thrown all things save trust in him to the

winds. Why did I love him? Why do I? for I do. I realize that as I write to you, though I am cold and wide-eyed, too and can see him clearly, his cowardice and selfishness, his absolute want of generosity that would let him consider no point of view but his own, no human being but himself. I understand him well enough now, the side of his nature that made him come after me, the fascination that my youth was to him, and perhaps that only; I see without flinching the whole of the maddening degradation. He never did one generous thing towards me; he never sent me one wholly generous letter, for in every one there was an air of restraint, of care not to commit himself, of holding back. He cared for nothing concerning me, but only for his own pleasure and fancy for the moment. And yet the fact remains that I loved him and glorified him and lived only to him and for him.

He was not wholly kind to me, even in that mad summer in which we were never apart. He lectured and scolded and sulked with me; we had many foolish quarrels, over which I nearly broke my heart, and when we made them up it was all my doing and none of his.

If I had been in the right, it made no difference. He was not capable of owning when he was wrong.

I am very hard upon him, my dear old love whom I loved more than my own soul; but, as I said before, you must measure my suffering by my bitterness, and perhaps my love, too. I have been beaten by fate or my own folly, which you will, till I am so hard that sometimes I feel like a stone.

It was Janet who first grew uneasy at the state of things.

"Dear Miss Madge," she said, in her country way, "and when is it that you and Mr. Mark are going to marry?"

My heart stood still; instinctively I dreaded being questioned.

"I don't know, Janet. You must not talk of that."

"But he's asked you to marry him, surely? He's been here and with you all day long, weeks in and weeks out. He's asked you to marry, surely?"

She looked at me severely.

"No, Janet. He hasn't asked me. I don't think he wants to marry."

Janet knew our mother before we were born. She had nursed us as babies. I could not dispute her right to question me.

"If he doesn't want to marry you, Miss Madge, dear, he oughtn't to want to be with you day after day. It's taking your heart and maybe your good name and life away."

"Oh no, Janet; oh no," I cried, "he likes being with me. He may not want to marry yet, but he likes being with me."

"Is he fond of you?" she asked, her kindly old face turning anxiously towards me.

Again I faltered, and I saw vaguely how careful he had been.

"I think so, Janet. He would not be always with me if he did not care."

"Has he told you so? Has he told you that he loves you, dear heart?"

For a minute I looked at her in silence, feeling as though a door had been suddenly opened and I had looked out at a dark night and saw no light ahead, no star above, yet knew that I might have to go forth—whither? But I shook off my fear, though my lips trembled as I answered:

"No—no, Janet. He hasn't said it—words are not necessary."

"Yes, dearie, they are; and if he's an honest man, he'll tell you that he loves you, and if he's not, better let him go. He makes love to you, like enough, takes you in his arms, and kisses you?"

I was silent, for I could not contradict her.

"No honest man does that unless he loves a girl, Miss Madge," she added, sternly.

"But he has known me all my life, Janet," I pleaded.

"All the more reason that he should be honest towards you. Make no mistake, women trust and men deceive. Does he know you love him, my dearie?" she asked, softly, for her kindly heart ached sorely for me.

"Yes, Janet"—and I burst into tears—"he knows that I love him, for I betrayed it long ago at the studio before we left London."

She put her arms around me and drew me on her lap as she used to do when I was a tiny child and cried because my mother did not come back to us.

"I have loved him ever since I was in India, Janet."

"And did he make love to you there?"

"Yes," I whispered.

"And kept a guard on his tongue and a lock on his lips all the time; never talked of marriage, never said out once like a man that he loved you—never once, my darling."

I fell to considering his words day after day, and his letters, there had been scores of them, but not one of them contained the words for which my whole soul awoke to hunger.

"No, Janet, no;" then a flash of light broke on me. "But he has often said we will do this and we will do that; and only a little while ago, when I was afraid we were doing wrong in being together so much he said, 'What nonsense, two people who like each other.' That shows he means, he cares—he is not one to make protestations—they are not like him; he would think them beneath him."

"No man thinks it beneath him to be honorable, dearie."

"Oh, but he is honorable," I cried in despair.

"Don't see him any more, Miss Madge."

"But I must, Janet."

"Don't let him be with you all day; don't let him make love to you till he can find a tongue to speak, and if he can't, let him go."

"I can't let him go, Janet—I can't," I whispered. "Don't be cruel to me. I must trust him—I will. This is August, the summer will soon be over. Perhaps he will speak before we leave here. He may think it isn't necessary He does, I know he does. He thinks I understand without words, just ordinary words, they are for ordinary people, not for him. Don't interfere, dear Janet, let it go on to the end of our time here. Let me stand or fall, all my hope and happiness, by him."

"As many a poor soul has by a man before, and will in days to come," said Janet, rocking herself.

"If he fails me I can die," I pleaded.

"It's easy to talk of dying, but life clings," poor Janet answered, brushing the tears from her eyes. "But it is only a little while longer that we have to stay here—just to the end of September. Let him have his chance; but hold back, dear; as woman holds off, man follows; as she comes forward, he falls back; remember that, Miss Madge."

From that time I was awake, and longed, with a longing that was madness, to hear him say that he loved me. I tried to hold back, as

Janet told me, to be more distant, more formal, colder; but how could I after the terms we had been on? Besides, in spite of my former engagement to James Harrison, and my Indian experiences, I was unsophisticated still; and as soon as I was out of earshot again, and had been five minutes with Mark, I trusted him as much, as blindly, as absolutely as ever. If he were not worth loving, it would be better to find it out, and let the knowledge kill me. Already I think I divined the sorrow that was before me, if he had only been making me his plaything, the shame and remorse I should suffer, the boundless scorn that, later on, when the pain had at last burned out, would consume me, and leave but the ashes of my love for him.

He seemed to know that something had happened. He was waiting to take me on the river; we met by the gate; there was a look of inquiry on his face.

"Well?" he said; but I could not raise my eyes. "Has anything happened?"

"No," I answered.

We went down the wooden steps into the boat and put off in silence. He pulled up by the island, at which we had so often landed before.

"Come," he said. "We will rest here a bit."

I took his hand and stepped ashore. We went along the narrow path-way that parted the underwood to a grassy patch before an oak-tree.

"Now tell me," he said, "for I can see that something has happened. What is it?"

"It is nothing," I said—"nothing, only that we are—" But I stopped, for I could not repeat what Janet had said.

"Well?"

"It is only that I wish John knew that you were here; that we meet so often, that—" But I stopped, and could not go on. I was afraid and ashamed. He looked at me with calm surprise.

"What nonsense!" he said. "We are not children; we know what we are doing. I will make it all right with John, if it is necessary." He got up as if he were displeased. "Come," he said coldly, "perhaps we had better go back."

But for answer I broke into passionate tears.

"Oh, don't be angry!" I cried. "I cannot bear it."

"Then why do you try to make me so?" he asked, as if he were my master.

"I never will again. I will never think stupid things any more; I will trust you absolutely."

"Perhaps you had better not," he answered, cynically. "Who knows how it may end?"

I looked at him in dismay.

"I don't understand," I faltered. As if he repented, his manner changed.

"Perhaps you are right in being afraid of me, Madge," he said gently. "It is a pity you ever set eyes on me."

"Oh no, no!" I cried. "And afraid—I am not afraid, dear Mark; I am not, indeed."

As if to show that I was forgiven, he put his arm through mine, and we sauntered round the island, and not back to the boat, as I had feared. Suddenly the words came to my lips, almost without my knowing it.

"You have known me since I was a little girl, Mark."

"Yes, since you were a little girl," he repeated, tenderly, and, stooping, kissed my wrist; "and in many things she is a little girl still."

So that phase ended. Do you understand it all? Him—me? I would that I did; for never yet has understanding of him come to this heart of mine that was not mixed with pain or scorn or shame.

We went on just as we had before Janet spoke to me. His manner was as tender as ever, but he held himself well in hand; and though he wrung all manner of unguarded admissions from me, he made none that bound me to him.

At last the summer—that long, delicious summer that I look back upon as the heaven of my whole life, though I did but walk through it to the hell beyond—came to an end. He flagged towards the close; his manner grew less eager, his voice more abstracted; he made excuses for not coming so often to the cottage, or for going long walks and drives and pulls on the river. Nay, there were days on which we did not meet at all, and when we did, we no longer spent our time over driftless talk or in sweet silence.

Gradually, as though they had been studied beforehand, there crept into his talk allusions to his future and mine, as if he thought of them as separate ways—of my some-day marriage and of his travels. Into my heart there crept an awful dread, a questioning, an everlasting wondering I did not dare to face.

"Some day, when I am far away, and you and your husband—" he began one day—it

was the last time we ever went on the river together.

"Why do you talk like that?" I cried. "I shall never marry—never."

"Ah, that is what all women declare beforehand," he answered. But though he laughed, I knew that he was watching me narrowly. It raised a little terror in my heart. Were all things between us coming to an end? Oh, sooner might I lie down and die.

But, day by day almost, his manner grew colder, and more and more careful, a little wearied, too, as though he were waiting to see the play out, and would be glad when it was finished. His words were fewer and more distant; and slowly, like a nightmare, there crept over me the knowledge that he was severing his life from mine—and it was so.

In late September we were to go back to town, and Janet made ready. Mark went a fortnight before we did. On his arrival he wrote me a curt little note, and that was all.

I counted the hours of our last week at the cottage, longing to see John again, but longing still more to see Mark—to be near him, to know that at any hour he might come if he would

and that at any moment, with the sound of his voice, all the misery that possessed me might be swept away. I sometimes think that my feeling for him was a madness—that he had made it one. Oh, the carefulness of that man not to commit himself; the calm way in which he deliberately took my life into his hands, amused himself with it, nursed it and moulded it, and then, when he was tired of it, threw it on one side with impatience and forgetfulness.

The last day of all at the cottage came, and while Janet finished packing I went on the river once more—to the island where he and I had spent so many hours together. I did not tell Janet I was going there, for her quiet scorn of him was more than I could bear. It was strange enough to go alone. I got out of the boat, and, having made it fast, looked behind me stealthily, and trod softly, as though I were doing some strange forbidden thing, or treading a graveyard, and feared to awaken the sleepers. I went towards the tree beneath which we had rested so often. I sat down and covered my face with my hands, and gave myself up to the misery that possessed me. I thought over all the days we had spent together, all that he had said, all

that we had done from that first hour in the sunshine at Bombay to the last, a fortnight ago, when he had wished me good-bye at the cottage with, "Well, I must be off; we shall meet in town, I suppose?" His manner had said clearly, "This is the beginning of a new order of things, remember, for the old one is ended." He had stooped and kissed my cheek, and was gone..... I raised my face; all was still, no sound of a boat going by, no note of a bird overhead to disturb the silence, only the leaves falling—poor leaves, that had hung so fresh and high, and now fell low, sere and yellow—with a whisper that I seemed to understand: "The day is over, the summer is gone, and you are alone, as all human beings are alone sooner or later. It is a part of life, so great a part that it is nearly the whole; only some are alone in the silence and some in the midst of many who go past them, but never take account."

I put my hands over my eyes again, I stopped my ears, and rocked to and fro, and wondered when I should die. Oh, what girlhood suffers, Nell! Yet how few who are near understand, and how some scoff, and most forget! At last, in sheer despair, I got up, almost ran to the

boat, and rowed back with the strength of despair—youth's despair—in my arms. I would never see the cottage again, I would never see the island again.....

Janet was ready; the luggage had gone to the station. We got into a fly and slowly followed. It was all over; the summer was finished.

Mark came to see us soon after we were back in the town, but he was changed altogether. In some sort of way he made an apology for the past. "I think we were very foolish to go on as we did all the summer," he said, "and last winter at the studio. Jack and I had a talk before he went abroad, and I ought to have remembered it; but, after all, you are not a child.' What could I say, and what could I do? If I had refused to let him come to the house, or had quarrelled with him, what could I have said to Jack? Besides on what excuse could I have quarreled with him that would not have left me shamefaced? Above all, too, I loved him, even yet, a thousand times too much to risk seeing him no more. So, silent and miserable, I let things drift as they pleased.

We never went back to the old footing—never. He came to see us once a week; but his

manner grew cold and formal, critical and fault-finding. I have learned to know that the first sign of love's waning is when it takes to being critical. Love? The pity of it is that I can never be sure that Mark had ever any love at all for me, or I could forgive him everything.

That winter his views of life seemed to change, his plans to alter entirely. Without telling me so in actual words, he was always trying to convey this to me, and I felt as helpless to swim against the strange tide that was setting in as to swim with it. For, if he could change so suddenly, I could not. If all the summer and the winter before he had been dishonest, I had been honest enough, and what I appeared to feel that I had felt and not pretended. But what he felt and intended now was suddenly thrust upon me. We had often talked of some day painting a picture together. It had been his idea, not mine. He was to paint the figures, and I the background. We were to begin it when we were back in town. I alluded to it in one of my letters. His reply was: "We must paint our great picture later on in life, for I have too much to do to think of it yet. We

are both sure to marry, and if some day I like your husband and you like my wife, we can then astonish the world with our united efforts." Was not that sufficient? Yet, in after days, he had the meanness to taunt me with being false to him—to him who never once was true to me or said a word to bind me.

Gradually his visits ceased, but we often wrote to each other. A correspondence had somehow been established between us, though his letters were never those of a lover. Yet he assumed an authority in my life that, against my will, had a certain sweetness, and I submitted and referred all things to him, and thought him manly when he bullied me, and found an odd delight even in being browbeaten —nay, I liked him for his very tyranny, his anger and cruelty. We had a long quarrel once, and he wrote me letters full of jibes and taunts and fault-finding; and when at last he stirred the devil that, after all, is chained near most passionate women's hearts, and I gave him back the bitterness he sent me, he refused to open any more letters, yet sent me a volley of insults. Manly, was it not, Nellie, to bully from a safe corner a woman whose love he had

won, and whose life he had filled with shame and humiliation?

We made up that quarrel. But he took some vast credit to himself for forgiving me, and in the letter in which he did so told me that living alone so much spoiled me, he wished he could see me "married to some one who would be as fond of you and as proud of you as he ought to be." A noble sentiment, truly worthy of him who uttered it.

Nell, I can write no more to-night, but in a day or two I will go on.

XII.

THE SAME TO THE SAME.

TO go on. John came back early in November. He asked if I had seen much of Mark.

I answered simply, "Yes, he came and stayed at the inn near the cottage."

They met that evening, and perhaps something passed between them, for they were never again very intimate. and Mark's visits ceased

from that time. He only came to our house once afterwards, to say good-bye before he went abroad for some months to the Cape, as artist for his paper—a formal visit during which my heart stood still. I never asked John for an explanation; I could not. Then followed a weary time enough; John was at work all day, and occupied or out most evenings; the winter months went by—a long, dark winter of misery and shame and remorse to me. I want to hurry over it; it shakes me even now to remember. . . .

Nellie, dear, there are some things we do of which we can give no account; and there is one that I did of which I want to tell you. In the wild manner in which girls overdo things I vowed that if in the whirl and twirl of time Fate should ever give me Mark's love, that love for which I had hungered so, and if by some strange twist he should ask me to be his wife, I would refuse him; for what woman with any pride at all would marry a man who had heaped upon her the insults that he had heaped on me? Injuries, nay, blows, I could have forgiven, but not that which he had done to me. I am ashamed to tell you how I strengthened my

vow, but one day I walked alone—a cold, dreary day—to Kensal Green, and knelt down beside my mother's grave, and sobbed till I thought my heart would break; and as I crouched down, kissing the earth that was her covering, I swore as I loved her, and as I knew in her life and in her dying hour she had loved her children, that I would never more be anything in the world to Mark, cost me what it might. "Never, never, mother, dear, I swear to you," I cried, and put my face down on the icy grass, and felt as though a strange thrill of comfort and sympathy came to me from her still heart beneath. Then I walked back calmly and with a feeling of security I had not known for months.

Sometimes, nay, often, I have thought that all Mark's conduct was because he mistook me. It made my heart stand still when the idea first occurred to me—it seemed too dreadful to be possible—and yet again and again it has come back to me—as the solution of the past—it is that he thought me fast and bad. Honest men do not make love to women as he made love to me, and to women they have known all their lives, unless they think them— ; but it makes my face burn with shame ; I cannot write it ;

and even then it is despicable enough, and does but save them from the last depth of utter scoundrelism. But if he did not think—*that*, could he have treated me as he did ? Could he, too, after the terms we had been on, have spoken of the possibility of our some day doing work together and being friends, "if he liked my husband and I liked his wife." Maddening as the thought is, Nell, there is yet some grain of secret comfort in it, for my baseness would have weakened his, have accounted for his conduct, and I loved him so—I do still—that I believe I could send my soul down any depth, if by doing so I could raise his.

It was in the spring that followed on that winter, and while Mark was still abroad, that John became almost suddenly famous. His professional work prospered amazingly, and all things went well with him, as they have done ever since. We grew richer, and went out more, entertained at home, and had more in all ways to fill our lives. Everybody liked John; he made endless friends—he is so simple and clever, so unassuming, and yet so perfect in his manner that it is easy to understand his fascination for the world, the ease with which

people loved him, and the eagerness with which they ran after him when they once came to know him. The result was that he was more and more from home, unless he stayed to help me receive friends (and that was not very often); he joined societies, spoke at meetings, and was on committees, for John has always held that a man should play as busy a part in the world as it will let him. These things drew us further apart, not at heart, but as regarded the close intimacy of daily life.

All this time, and for months past, Austin Brian had been in love with me. Why, Heaven only knows, for I had eyes and ears for no man—all human beings were the same to me: I used to feel like an automaton. He was quiet and manly and clever. I have often thought that, had I never seen Mark, I could have loved Austin, have married him; but as it was he was a shadow to me, a nothing—he took no hold on me at all. The moment he was out of my sight I forgot him altogether; when he was in it I only took the faintest interest in him—the interest that comes of forcing one's self to get outside the prison into which one's heart can put one—a solitary,

miserable cell enough in which one broods and hates one's life, and beats against its bars, and suffers a thousand times more than if stone walls had shut one in. One day—it seemed so odd I could have laughed, but that mentally I only looked at it in the dazed way in which I looked at all things—Austin Brian proposed to me. I refused him, of course, and the incident took no hold on me. He did not avoid me afterwards or cease coming to the house. At another time this might have piqued me, though he had asked that we might remain friends; but now I did not care, and scarcely noticed it. That he loved me still I saw plainly enough in the hazy way I saw everything, but concern of mine it was none. I remember we danced together a good deal one night—it was at the Woolwich ball; we drove down to it with the Callows, who had made up a party to go (they had relatives quartered at Woolwich, and were always going to and fro), and at the end he said to me, "I shall never forget to-night." I looked up at him in wonder. What was there to remember?

One day a sort of crisis came—it was in the

late summer, just before we left town. The morning brought a note from Mark. He was coming to England for a week, but should only stay a couple of days in London, "so there would be no time to look in, but he hoped I was all right; he had been reading John's article," etc. Was not this enough? A year before we had been lovers; he had not seemed able to bear a single day away from me; now, after months of absence, he could not manage to come for even an hour. . . . I want to put it all shortly. It tries me sorely to live over all those past days again. . . . I did not answer Mark's letter; it was impossible. I did not mention it to John, for my lips felt as if they could not say his name. But I shed bitter tears over his note. I remember that in these calm days, and wonder at my passion then, for I covered the half sheet of paper with wild kisses and loved him—clinched it in my hands and loathed him.

That evening John did not come home to dinner, but sent me a note saying he would be back by nine at latest. It was late July, and most people had left town. I could eat nothing, but went out in the twilight, feeling

I could not stay in the house. I walked quickly away from Bolton Row, on and on, till somehow I was near the Regent's Park. Perhaps it was thinking of the Berrys that insensibly sent my feet towards them. When I realized where I was, I turned and almost fled in another direction. At last I was near Clarence Gate, and then by Cornwall Terrace, all the time feeling half dazed and as if a whirlwind were before and behind, and I walked between. Suddenly some one passing by started and stopped. It was Austin Brian; he looked at me bewildered.

"I have a headache," I explained, "and John is not coming home till nine. I wanted to walk about alone; perhaps it is an unusual thing to do, but it does not matter; Janet could not come with me." Probably my voice or manner betrayed that I was miserable, I do not know, but he seemed to divine it, though he said nothing, only turned round as if to take me back. Just to take refuge from my wretched, miserable, self, I let him walk beside me. He had infinite tact and human feeling. . . . Oh, if years before I had but seen him instead of Mark. We went on together

into the park, for I said that I wanted to be near the trees, and not to go back to the four walls of the drawing room in Bolton Row. We talked of books, of scenery, of the sky that had still some fading crimson in it from the sunset that was over, and every minute became grayer with the coming night. Suddenly I felt something at my throat; a strange blinding came before my eyes; I knew that my face was white, my lips trembling; I looked away into the distance, longing to vanish into it forever, evermore; life only made me ache with memories, filled me with dread of the years that seemed to stretch out before me, a vista of waiting and tiredness I had not strength or courage to face. For a moment I thought my senses were going. He looked at me in wonder and alarm, for I had stopped, feeling as if I could not go on.

"I am so tired," I gasped; "I think I shall die." The words came piteously—it was only by a violent effort that I kept back the hopeless tears that struggled to come into my eyes. As if he understood, he drew my hand onto his arm with a tenderness like that of a mother's to a worn-out child; he looked down at me and almost supported me.

"You are very tired ; I can see that," he said, gently ; "and sad, too. I wish you would tell me—that I can help you ; I would give my life to be of the very least service to you." There was no passion in the voice, only a depth, an affection that carried just for one lone moment an infinite rest into my soul. He was so strong, too, with the manly strength that is born of many things, but most, perhaps, of gentleness ; and the men who possess this are our unconscious masters for good, just as perhaps the men of Mark's type are our masters for evil. A few minutes later he had called a hansom and was driving me back. I thought of that first drive to the studio with Mark, the man I had loved so well, and of this with the man whom I knew loved me. He was going to leave me at the door, but a sort of desperation came over me. John was probably at home, or would be immediately, but he would be busy, and I should be left again to brood over my own imaginings.

"Come in," I said; "John will be glad to see you. We have tea at half-past nine; come and have a cup." He entered gladly; perhaps he thought it encouragement. John had not

returned; he did not come for a long time. In half an hour Austin Brian was pleading his cause again in this little drawing-room where you and I met again the other day after the long years of abscence. He was good, Nell, and he loved me; he wanted to take care of me, to give me a bright and happy life; he seemed to understand how lonely I was, to know all the longings that were mine years ago—of anything but the best in one he had no comprehension. And he was not afraid or ashamed to speak as was the other man, on whom I had wasted my life's love. I knew that with him I should have rest and security, that the better side of me would live and the bad shrink ashamed away. Above all, I felt how truly he loved me. I was very grateful to him, and I saw that it was in my power to do some good, to make some one happy—I, to whom happiness was forever denied, might do this.

"I never loved any woman but you," he said, simply; "I never shall." I cannot tell you how it all came about, but somehow I promised to marry him, told him I would try to love him, to be happy, and let him kiss me just once, thinking the while with a

shuddering shame, though my heart still quickened with love as well as with scorn of him, of Mark's first kiss in the garden at Poona. Then John came home, and Austin went up and told him straight, brimming over with joy while he spoke and not striving to hide it, and in a flash it seemed I was engaged and all my future arranged. For the first few hours I was too dazed to comprehend altogether what I had done, to feel keenly anything save a sense of serenity, of rest, of almost strained thankfulness; but a day later and I was repenting wildly, feeling like a prisoner, like one who had shut the door on all possibilities. And there was nothing to be done; I was no longer a mere girl; it was my own deed—I was wretched —nearly mad. Suddenly it struck me that Mark would understand the agony and shame I had gone through if I told him all, and that perhaps, if only for fear of any words in this world being forever too late would speak up at last and set things right to my heart, though it was forever too late to set them right outwardly. He would surely counsel me, I thought — would be

gentle to me this once. Had we not spent long days and weeks together, content to be the boundaries of each other's world? Oh, deep down in his heart, though never his lips had said it, he must have had some love, some care for me; and if but for a single moment I might know it, I could walk in silence and calmness forever after, though I never set eyes on his dear face again. Besides, I had had no secrets from him for so long, had lived no life that he had not governed, I could not bear by my own doing to know that our lives were forever separated. So I wrote and told him that I was engaged; that I had somehow let it come about, and that though I saw how good and true Austin was, I was not in love with him, and chafed and wanted to be free again.

He replied quickly enough, saying how glad he was; he had wanted to see me married; he did not understand my not being satisfied; soon I would wonder at my own impatience, and so on. How that letter fretted me, how like my own funeral sermon it seemed; I put it away for a while, then I burned it, holding it down with the poker while it blazed, lest, like a fiend, it should rise, and its words madden me again.

Then I gave myself up to the martyrdom of my engagement—an odd, exaggerated word to use. But it was nothing less, and all the more a martyrdom because I felt that had I never seen Mark I could have been content—have loved and married Austin, that he would have satisfied all the higher feelings in my nature—the eager searching for ideals, the striving after better things than those within my immediate reach. But, as it was, it could not be; nothing could be save my dispair. I realized that I was a woman with a past, that in my heart there were memories of days and hours and meetings of which I could never tell a husband through all the years of a life that we might spend together, that forever I should be a deception to him. How could I tell him of all that had been, shared as it was with a man who never once had said he loved me? If Mark had only spared me that. I have so often thought that he should have lied to me, have pretended that he loved me, that he would have done so had he not taken me for all that I dread to think. He would not surely have put into the life of a woman he thought good and pure all the shame that he put into mine? Mind this, dear Nell,

that had I done all that I did for a man I loved and who had loved me, I should have thought little of the shame; but to have done it for a man who did not even think me worth a pretense of love—oh, bitter pain indeed, bitter pain that made my very soul rock with misery, and memories that stupefied me.

And yet, with the sight of Austin's face, with the sound of his voice, there came ever a sense of peace, of rest and thankfulness, a view of life, a dream, a vista that made my heart yearn—but that I knew had come too late. It was like a sight of heavenly stillness to the worn and passionate soul that, stretching out to reach earthly bliss, had slipped down, down into the torments below. And day by day he loved me more, and forever he would say, and seemed to delight in saying, how good and pure and sweet I was; he believed in me as though I had been a saint, an ideal of all that was best in womanhood. It was for my sore punishment that it should be so, perhaps .... I could not go on bearing it, Nell; I could not. One night, after he had protested his love for me, looking into my face as only one's lover does, suddenly I spoke. I begged him to set me free. I told

him that I was bad and wicked, and could not put into words all that was in my heart, or tell him of by-gones that I remembered ; but that I could not marry him—I was not fit to do so ; that I was worn and hard and cold towards all people save one, and from even him I recoiled. "I want to be free and alone," I cried ; "forever alone" and I clasped my hands and implored him to let me go.

I cannot tell you more. He went to Egypt. A year later he was killed in some accidental skirmish. The news of his death fell on my ear like the sound of a death bell to a murderer .... Oh God, what a life it has been, this inner life of mine, of which no one knows or suspects! Yes, my life, Madge Brooke's, who is supposed to be cold and worldly, to have made many conquests, and to care only for them and for society....

I told Mark it was broken off. He wrote and regretted it ; he felt sure that "it would have been better to have married a good fellow really fond of me." The way in which he spoke of any one being fond of me was cynical, as though he half doubted the possibility.

I have so often wished that I could kill him,

that I could see him lying stark and dead, and know that I had done it; I would put my face against his till its icy coldness sent a shudder through me and then for all eternity suffer torments, burn and burn till my heart and soul, that felt so black and wicked, were white, white ashes.

I used to see Austin's dead face at one time, no matter where I turned or what I did; but now it has gone, passed on with the shadows into far eternity; and still—oh, Nellie, for my sad curse—I sometimes love that man whose cowardice has ruined me, body and soul. I saw him once after Austin's death; that was the last time I saw him at all. I called at the Berrys' one day. Some fascination makes me go there every now and then; they, knowing nothing, think it is mere passing civility to themselves. He was there, and when I came away he came too, and walked home with me. I was cold and silent—it piqued him, I suppose, for he grew almost tender, and talked of old days, till I thought my heart would burst; but I kept my lips shut. Then suddenly he turned and reproached me in roundabout ways —he never in his life spoke up like a man, for

good or evil—for having been false to him. He had not gone off, he said, and got engaged to some one else; he had not forgotten so soon. Could he fall lower than that—be more contemptible? I could not answer him, but I looked up and felt the tears come into my eyes. He has been all my life, and I have loved him as few women love in these cold-hearted days. Even that afternoon, as I walked beside him from the Berrys', I could have respected him again, loved him again, if he had but once said out that he loved me, or had loved me; or that he had not loved me and begged my forgiveness for his treachery; but no, honesty and manliness with him do not include truthfulness and courage towards women. I think that accusation of being false to him was a revelation of all things. Then I understood him, and shall forevermore—or, at least, I think so. False? Why, if I had worshiped Austin Brian, and had married him and lived with him all my days, and the world had quoted me as a devoted wife, I should still have been no more false than is the girl who, when all earthly happiness is at an end, and human hopes have passed her by, takes her miserable heart to a convent, and

throws herself at her Saviour's feet with an adoration that is half despair.

This is my story, dear. It ended three years ago; but a few days since I heard that Mark, who has been roaming about, was coming back to England again for good. I long, yet dread, to meet him, though I see clearly enough now, and understand him. Do not hate me because you know me through and through.

Next time I shall tell you of frivolities, and forget that the world holds anything beneath the surface on which the sun shines. Oh, the mistake, the sorrow, the tragedy of human feeling! Thank Heaven that I have done with it! MADGE.

XIII.

MADGE TO NELLIE.

March 6, 1884.

IT is a month since I wrote to you last, those nightmare letters. I am better now; for the past is only a grave on which in this present time I stamp my angry

feet. Fate has, after all, not been so very cruel, and I am thankful, behind all my other feelings, that Mark's path and mine lie apart. He is well enough or ill enough to have loved, to have made into a romance; but had we married, how I should have hated him by this time, save in those wild moments when I was blind to all that was best on earth.

I sometimes think that, without meaning or knowing it, the Berrys helped to separate us. They have different ideas from his and mine on all things, and they are primly evangelical. They are a little cynically inclined, too, as people sometimes are who have little belief in human nature, or who have not been lucky in their friends. I knew this, and during that last weary winter, when Mark and I were living out the end of our play, and I was learning my bitter lesson, I used to go to the Berrys', and, with a half-scornful daring I could not explain, say things that I knew would be repeated and commented on, and in my soul I scoffed and scorned him for judging me by hearsay. All the years he has been away I have done the same. Mrs. Berry told me she wrote to him once a month ; I tried to give her some-

thing to say—I knew how he would sneer at this or interpret that after his own fashion, and I have lavished a measureless scorn upon him in my silent heart for doing so. But enough.

I am glad you have had a visit from John, dear Nell. He gave no hint of his intention till the morning he was starting; then suddenly he said:

"I am sorry to have missed Nellie, and shall run down to Worcester for a day to see her." He was always fond of you; no wonder he wanted to see you again. He said you were very gentle and sweet, and did him a world of good. Ask him again, if you can.

There is a scrap of news that amused me when I heard it: James Harrison is staying at Daffodil. Aunt Maria invited him—the once despised James Harrison. She wrote and told me that he was there, that he was very different from formerly, most fastidious in his tastes, that he found her dear girls charming, and that she greatly admired him. It is easy to see through: she means to let Isabel marry him; Grace is already engaged to a clergyman who has a church somewhere in the West Indies—a dismal prospect. Well,

Isabel will make a good, submissive little wife to James: probably she will like the house in Gower street—will think it altogether satisfying. Yes, it is a match that would do; I hope with all my heart it will come off, and poor old James be happy at last.

What else? I have strengthened my soul by reading some Browning. How well he makes one love strong men! His women, too, have hearts that beat and blood that flows quickly through their veins. A living world he gives us, and not a world of pulseless shadows that seem only to move in the moonlight, and to have no strength in the light of day.

Yesterday Lady Mary Sully came to see me; she is some relation of Sir Noel's, and seems to take a sentimental interest in me. If she did but know—but I forgot—have I told you about Sir Noel Franks? He comes here often? Do you know him by reputation? He is clever and diplomatic; people say he will be in the next Government, that he is one of the coming men in politics. He ought to be "come" and not "coming," for he is fifty, and looks it, very bald, very silent, and a little sombre; cold in manner, careful in making a statement, rather

stately and dried-up-looking, withal interesting. Plan-making and ambitious, I should say; he interests me in a cold and intellectual manner; he would not be bad if one wished to make a worldly marriage. He contemplates making an unsentimental one with me if I will have him. I know that; I hear it in his voice, polite and complimentary; see it in his eye, criticising but satisfied. He thinks I should do, dear Nell. I am much flattered, but I keep his proposal at bay for the present. In the future I may bring it on to refuse and have done with, or to deliberately accept. Love is a finished story, and if I marry it must be from ambition. Love is not all, I said a few letters back, and it is true; moreover, with my past and my feeling, I could not endure to marry a man overmuch in love with me. He might be demonstrative and affectionate. It would drive me mad; I should hate him. I am not dead enough even yet to endure sentiment I do not share. Things cannot go on always as they are now. John will marry, I hope, and I must make a home somewhere. I do not feel that I can make it alone; I am not sufficiently strong-minded; and though I do not want to love, the feminine instincts

are still strong within me, and I hunger after being cared for in some sort of a fashion—the colder the better. I want to be a consideration to some one, nay, even a burden; I want to spend some one's money—a droll thing to say, but I do not say it in a mercenary spirit, but only because there is an unconscious pleasure in the exercise of one's feminine weaknesses, to be the first person in some one's home, the chief person in some one's life, the person he was bound to consider first; and the more distinguished the man, the greater would be my inward satisfaction: since love is denied me, all this is my longing. A career for myself I simply could not endure except that which consisted in helping to make one for some one else. Yes, I think I could find life worth living, if I must live—and life is a terribly presistent thing—in helping a clever man, and especially a diplomatist, to make a career—could know something that would even pass itself for happiness, in sharing the rewards that in my secret soul I knew I had helped to win. There is an excitement, too, in helping to govern the country, to make history, as do all clever men who take an active part in public affairs. I should

like, If I marry, to gain that as compensation for all that will never come to my heart again. But I have kept Sir Noel at bay. I cannot bring myself to take the final step, and there is no occasion while I still have my dear John.

I have almost a horror, so strong is my shrinking, of facing the world alone; but for that I would not contemplate marriage at all, and only can contemplate it in the shade of an ambitious outside life; a quiet one, such as James Harrison thought might satisfy me, would be worse than suicide. But to go back to Lady Mary. She called yesterday and sat a long time telling me Sir Noel's history. He was very much in love when he was a young man with the daughter of a West Country parson; they were engaged, and he was devoted to her; she jilted him to make a grander marriage, for he was then poor and without prospects. She became a fashionable person, a leader in society, and finally went abroad with her husband, who is governor at an important place. Sir Noel gave up sentiment after this experience, has never cared for women since, and is not likely to do so now. I think, from what Lady Mary says, that he felt a certain dogged

joy at first in succeeding to a relation's money, in being successful; but all this is merged now in the eagerness of the statesman. Still, though he has ceased to take a keen interest in women, he feels that the time has come when it would be as well to marry. He thinks, as I say, that I should do. Perhaps I shall, dear Nell; I do not know. I have become a cold and worldly woman, just as he has become a cold and worldly man. So we should agree, neither expecting nor desiring nor exacting impossible things of each other, yet finding plenty to fill our lives, and having joint interests enough to make us pull together with a certain pleasantness.

Dear, it is two years since your husband died. Could you not bear to come to town for a bit and stay here? You must bring the child, of course. I should love to hear the sound of your footsteps up and down the stairs, to listen to your voice, to see your little one, to play with it and nurse it. I am hungry for the sight of a child that belongs to some one who is dear to me. What a wonderful thing it must be to have a child of one's own if one loves, or has loved, its father! To know that the life is there because you and he

have loved, and out of your love has grown all the immortality that humanity in itself can know. Life after life may dawn, even race after race may grow, and a strong nation rise because in the beginning two people have loved each other. Your child and his, your life and his going on when you and he alike are gone, and her child perhaps after her; and again and again; all because in the by-gone days you two loved and were together. I wish you would come, dear, and stay—as long a time as you can. You would make me better, more womanly—you see how selfish I am in wanting you—you would soften me. Sometimes now I feel so hard. It is only a shell; but there are shells that nothing can break; I do not want to own one of them, to be forever beyond reach of the best in the world—you and your child, Nellie, and the like of you.

We dine out to-night, go to the Grahams' "at home," and the Tetleys' ball afterwards. I like it; like to look at the people, each one with his history, his secrets, his ambitions, his memories, all nicely veneered over for the evening with a convenient social manner. I like to see the little crowd on the pavement

outside, watching the guests descend from their carriages, dim figures that seem to have come out of the darkness to watch us step into the light. I see their eyes on me, I feel them watch me enter the place into which they peer so curiously, and I think how merrily I could laugh if suddenly I might be one of them; if I might go back to a cellar-home, and fan the fire into a blaze, and by its light look up at homely faces that loved me and made the whole wide world a blessed place, no matter whether pain or poverty came or lagged. I am a fool, Nell, a fool, for I long and hanker after love still, though it is all over and done with forever and forever. I will write and ask Sir Noel and some others to dine as an antidote to all this nonsense. Come and stay, Nellie. I long for you.

XIV

MADGE TO MARK CUTBERTSON

March 8, 1884.

DEAR MARK,—John told me that you were back, and of his meeting with you yesterday, and that you said you wanted to come and see me. It is a little formal to write and ask leave after that, is it not? But perhaps you have many engagements and no time to come just on the chance of finding me at home. So this is to tell you that you will find me any day, as a rule, at about five. Or will you come and dine at eight on Wednesday next week? John told me to invite you. One or two others are coming; not many. Yours, M. B.

XV

MADGE TO NELLIE

March 9th.

MARK has sent me a note, one of his own vague, incomprehensible ones. He is coming to dine on Wednesday. All the rest you shall know later.

One thing more only: James Harrison and Isabel are engaged. How glad I am for him, for perhaps he will be happy at last! She, too, will be happy, I think. But Aunt Maria's tactics are amusing. Poor, despised James Harrison! It is a topsy-turvy world, dear Nell. Come and stay in this portion of it with John and me for a bit.

XVI

MADGE TO JAMES HARRISON.

March 8, 1884.

DEAR COUSIN JAMES,—That is what I shall call you in future. Has it a pleasant sound?

I am delighted, indeed, to hear of your engagement to Isabel. I had an idea of what might happen, I confess, when I heard that you were staying again at that most beguiling Daffodil. My best and truest and most cordial wishes for your happiness now and always, and for hers, too—you must consider this letter to be written to you both. Nothing could have given me greater pleasure than your news this morning.

I feel sure that you are very lucky, dear cousin, for you have had all sorts of worldly prosperity already, and now you are going to have a dearlittle wife,and your children the kindest of mothers. Tell Isabel I throw up my hat for joy on her behalf.

I shall come to your wedding and dance merrily if Aunt Maria gives us the opportunity. I am glad it is to be immediately. "Happy is the wooing that is not long a-doing," says the song of the proverb.

Till then, you two, farewell.

MADGE BROOKE

XVII

MADGE TO NELLIE.

March 15th.

I AM sorry you cannot give us more than a week, dearest Nell, but that is better than nothing. John will meet you at Paddington on Friday, at five. We will have a happy time, and pretend that we are all children again.

Yes, I will tell you about Mark. He dined

here last night, but he hardly said three words to me. He flirted the whole time with little Mrs. Browson. She is young and fresh, of the dairy-maid type, but very pretty, with lovely coloring. Her husband is a rising barrister, exceedingly calm and abstracted. I think he is grateful to any man who flirts with his wife—it takes some of her exuberance off his hands; moreover, he considers it a sign of the social success that I somehow divine to be his secret ambition.

Two days before the dinner Mark called here, late in the afternoon; I felt my heart stand still when he entered. It was three years and more since we had met. He is a little stouter; he does not look such absolutely good form as in the old days—his appearance does not gratify one's vanity so much. His expression, too, is not so good; it is more worldly; there is greater suggestion of sarcasm in the tone of his voice. We looked at each other swiftly; we both remembered—

"I thought I would come and see you before Wednesday—we can't talk much at a dinner-party. I wish you would not give one," he laughed. His laugh went through me, and

brought back a hundred memories. "Why, you are not much changed. Women generally change a good deal in three years," he added.

"Perhaps I am really—" I began, but could not go on. It was so strange to see him, to hear him speak again, to remember how I had cared for him. Did I care still? Do I? Ah, Nell, I do not know. He has a power over me, a spell, an influence, but what it is I do not know.

He stayed to tea: I watched him narrowly, half afraid. Once, when I handed him a cup, his hand for a moment touched mine—it went through me and made me shiver. What did it mean?

"And you are not married yet?" he said, in the old, mocking manner.

"No."

"You ought to be. Time is getting on; you are not a girl any longer." Could anything be in less good takte?

"No; but marriage is not everything," I answered.

"It generally is—to women."

"Oh, no—not now."

"Unless they are strong-minded."

"I am not strong-minded," I answered, "and it is not everything to me."

"You are so inconstant," he laughed. "You are not to be trusted."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"What I say," he answered. There was a little scorn in his manner that galled me to the quick.

"Mark, what do you mean?" I demanded, in a voice that I knew was half entreating. "Speak out plainly."

"Don't make a scene," he said. "We had better change the subject. I must be going in a few minutes."

"I don't want to change the subject," I said.

"I do," he answered, shortly. "Tell me how you spend your time. The Berrys say you are always going out. Turned into a fashionable woman; eh, Madge?"

"No, indeed; no."

"I prefer to think of you as the little girl I remember at Daffodil years and years ago—we won't say how many, since it is a sore subject."

Nell, that man is like a scourge to me; and yet, unless I loathe him, I love him still. The

tears came into my eyes, and I could not help it, while I answered :

"I am the little girl still, at heart—I am—"

"I am glad to hear it," he answered, as if he did not in the least believe me.

"The girl who spent all those days on the river three years ago." Was it my evil genius that made me say it ?

"We won't talk of those, if you please," he said, decisively.

"Why ?"

"You are a good deal changed since then," he answered, in the same tone ; and after a moment's hesitation, he added, "and so am I."

"Why did you come and see me," I asked, trying to pull myself together.

"I thought perhaps you would like to see me—that I should like to see you."

"I am glad to see you," I said. "It is always pleasant to see old friends."

"I am glad you think so. I should have thought you could forget—even old friends," he answered, watching me narrowly.

"Tell me what you mean."

"Nothing," he laughed, in a manner that galled me to the quick.

"Tell me about your work," I asked trying to change the subject.

"We have not painted *our* picture yet, Madge," he said, with sudden gravity.

"We will paint it later on in life," I answered, "when we are both married—that is, if you like my husband and I like your wife." He did not seem to recognize his own words again.

"That will never be; you know that," he said, softly. My heart beat wildly, his manner had grown tender. I flogged my soul with the remembrance of his old jibes and taunts, for fear lest I should love him once more—should believe in him again. "I wonder why we quarrelled," he added almost in a whisper.

"We didn't—"

"Well, we did something that drew us apart. Don't you think we were very foolish, Madge?" The scalding tears came into my eyes. I could not answer; but I gave a little, quick nod. He saw it, and over his face came a look of satisfaction. I loathed him for it, for I knew he was trying to play fast and loose with me again. But it shall not be, Nell. It shall not; it shall not. I have put one barrier between us; I will put others.

He went. But that night he wrote me one of the old fascinating letters—letters full of half-suggested tenderness, but in which he said nothing plainly; neither that he loved me, or wanted to be loved; only indirectly reproached me for being false. It was a letter that no woman could answer plainly. He knew it when he wrote it.

But I read it a dozen times, and kissed it, as I have kissed all his letters, even those that cut me sorely; and I hated and scorned him as it is given to few women to hate and scorn. Last night he dined here, devoting himself to pretty Mrs. Browson, scarcely looking at me. I am only a woman, so I revenged myself by flirting with Sir Noel Franks. He (Sir Noel) leaves town to-morrow for a fortnight. He asked if he might call here to-day before he went. I knew well enough what he meant, and answered No. I told him to come on his return. Nell, I shall marry him. God help me! And yet it is the best thing that can happen to me. The other man would break my heart whether I married him or remained single. With Sir Noel I need not remember that I have one. He will make no demand on it; he will satisfy my ambition.

I will set myself a task that will only be finished when he is Prime-minister—or Foreign Affairs, which is more picturesque—with a policy that sha'l keep the whole of Europe respectful. He will give me money, too, and ease and comfort. And all these will be something, some compensation; for without them there are many ugly bits, even in the most romantic worlds. I don't want to depend on John always. Besides, I want John to marry. If he does not find a wife for himself, I shall find one for him as soon as I have thrown off Mark's thraldom.

A busy, thinking, diplomatic life, in which I have forever to be *en evidence*, up and doing, always planning this step and that, and withal keeping note of the intellectual rate about me; finding out this genius, and presenting him to the world, to his own modest dismay; or rescuing that invention from the jaws of the middleman, and getting honor for the right quarter. Yes, yes, that is what it shall be. I will get outside myself. It is when I stay within myself that I find out how wretched a home has my heart made me. I will get outside. Nell, tell me this: is love a curse or a blessing? I sometimes think it is like death. A strange com-

parison, you will say. But, like death, it is a door-way we go through blindfold, whether we will or not; the bandage falls from our eyes, and we find ourselves in heaven or hell. There is less space in the universe than one would think. There must be less; for heaven and hell and this world of ours seems crowded and packed so close together it is but a minute from one to the other. With Mark—oh, my God! what I have suffered with Mark. In a single hour, in that by-gone summer, I have felt the licking tongues of hell's fire around my heart, and the soft balm of heaven smooth and kiss away all memory of them.

I think, perhaps, I may be a better woman if I marry Sir Noel — may think further away. Do you understand what I mean by that expression?—shall not be so taken up with myself and the passions for good and evil, light or darkness, that have torn my better self to ribbons. Mark has been a sort of Juggernaut to me; has ridden over my soul, and crushed it, with all the longings and higher feelings of which it was capable. I have been at his mercy all the best years of my life—even now, though I dread to think it, I am at his

mercy still. I struggle to shake him off; but I cannot—cannot; and sometimes yet could throw myself for love at the feet of a man I loathe.

Ah, well, the good of going over it, where is it?

Come on Friday. I wish you could have brought your baby; I am glad you call her baby still; it is one of the sweetest words on earth to a woman. What fools we women are, dear Nell! but sometimes we even love each other, for I love you, and dearly.

MADGE.

XVIII

MADGE TO MRS. ROBERT WILLIAMS.

March 27th.

DEAR AUNT MARIA,—John would write himself, but he is tremendously busy to-day, We want you to hear from ourselves a bit of news that makes us both, and one other, very happy indeed. John and Nellie Hamilton are engaged. She has been staying with us for a week; yesterday she left; John took her back to Worcester, and on his return told me that she had promised to be

his wife, and soon. Nothing in this world could be so good for him—she is one of the sweetest girls on earth, made for him, and he for her. You cannot imagine how glad I am, for Nellie has always been my closest, dearest friend, and now she will be my sister, too.

I hope Isabel is enjoying the buying of her trosseau, and looks forward with great joy to her wedding. We shall be delighted to come to it. We sent, yesterday, a case of Italian glass, which we lay at the feet of the bride and bridegroom. Isabel will find a note inside. Yours affectionately,

MADGE BROOKE.

XIX.

TO NELLIE.

April 18th.

IT has been a great joy to tell every one of your engagement to John, dear Nell; it is greater joy still to see how happy he is. Only, I wish you would not wait till September.

No, dear, of course not—I should not think of feeling driven from home because you are

coming here. I know well—it did not need words to tell me—how welcome I should be to you both. But life must and shall take some new shape. Now I cannot trust myself from day to day; this infatuation of love or hate must end. Mark is playing the old game with me—sheltering himself behind vague phrases, seeming to be one thing, while, all the time, something tells me that he is another, and he says no word by which one can make sure. He has either been or written pretty often lately. If he comes, he puts on an air of disapproval; if he writes, there is a strain of half tenderness, half cynicism in his letters, as though I had treated him badly, almost as if he liked me, yet did not trust me. What does it mean? He calls me a woman of the world, and sneers at all I do, and listens to all I say with an expression that maddens me. He makes me feel like a culprit; yet what have I done? It must and shall end; that is what I say to myself a hundred times a day. Nothing can set things right between us; yet every time I see his face and touch his hand I know that he could make me suffer again.

MADGE.

XX.

TO NELLIE.

April 18th.

IT is all over. We, the little group that knew each other so well in bygone days, are all thinking of marrying or being given in marriage.

This afternoon I accepted Sir Noel, we are to be married soon, before the summer is over, so that we may go away (we shall not want much honeymoon) and come back and finish out the season together.

Mrs. Berry called to-day, just after luncheon. She talked a great deal about Mark — how he had taken her to task for various things. Why? Her husband was dead, and he thought that when that was so a woman ought to be set down by her nearest male relation; he was the nearest one she had, so he did it. Soon her sons would be grown up, then no doubt they would take it upon themselves to direct her. It never seems to occur to her that a woman can steer her own course; she falls in quite naturally with Mark's idea of the inferiority of her sex.

"Still, one doesn't want to be dictated to about every little thing," she said, "and that is

what he would like to do; and then he never judges one generously. He always seems to think one's motives are so mean, or so different, at any rate, from what they really are; I shall pity the woman he marries with all my heart. He is making love to little Kate Seeley now," she added. What a fool I am, Nell, for my heart stood still!

"Who is she?" I asked.

"She is the daughter of an old school-fellow of mine. He met her at my house and made himself very agreeable—he can, you know—and Mrs. Seeley invited him, and he went; but I don't believe that it will really come to anything."

"Is she pretty?"

"Oh yes, and she thinks a good deal of herself; but she is twenty and fresh; and that is what he likes." It sets my teeth on edge. Yes, that is what he likes." Probably he comes here to strengthen his dislikings, and goes to her to strengthen his likings. Oh, Nellie, how I loathe him! and yet it is only yesterday that I covered the hands he had shaken as he said good-bye, with kisses, and listened to his footsteps going down the stairs, as though they

were the sweetest music in the world to me, and—Heaven help me—they were. Those dear footsteps—my heart will awake and beat, I think, if some day they pass over the place where I lie buried.

"Where does Miss Seeley live?" I asked Mrs. Berry.

"At Richmond. Probably he only makes her an excuse to go down to the park of an afternoon."

"Did he tell you about her?"

"No, her mother told me about him. I dare say she would like to marry him, but I don't suppose he means to marry her. He always liked flirting with a girl you know, he never means anything."

"No, of course not," I said. "He never means anything."

"He likes to amuse himself; but he never seems to think much of any one. I don't believe he will ever care for any one."

I was glad she told me that; it hardened me, and made me shudder to remember how he had made love to me in by-gone days. What a degradation it was!

Sir Noel came an hour after she had gone.

I welcomed him with thankfulness; I could have put out my hands to him like a drowning woman. A single glance at his face showed me why he had come. His manner was perfect, it is always excessively courteous and considerate towards women, and it has, besides a simple straightforwardness that makes one breathe freely. He looks good, too—I felt that as I looked up at his face. The sight of him, with all the thoughts and feelings that were upon me, was like a rush of cool air after a stifling madness of years.

"Miss Brooke," he said, when we had got through our greetings, "I have not come to pay you an ordinary visit; but one on a matter of the greatest importance—that is, to me." He spoke with extreme deference—all through the interview he treated me with more and more deference, as he became more and more convinced that his suit would prosper. "I have thought a good deal of how to put into words what I wish to say to you—into the words most likely to gain your sympathy and —assent; but I am afraid my diplomatic experiences have mostly been with my own sex, and I may spoil my own cause by—"

He stopped for a moment, and I looked at him critically; tall and thin, almost soldierly in his bearing, his voice a little low and excessively refined in its tone. There was restfulness in the thought of giving my weary life over to him, yet I thought of Mark's grave, almost cynical face—oh, my love, and dream, and torturer, whom I am forever driving out of my life, what fiend is it I wonder, that lodges in your soul and makes you so different from what surely God meant you to be? If only I might respect you, might think of you as even the vaguest ideal, though I never saw you again in this wide world, I could be thankful and satisfied. It is the scorn that kills me.

But there stood Sir Noel, for he had risen before me, and there stood I, leaning against the mantel-piece, looking idly at the china on it; and he had to be answered.

"Diplomacy is an art that men usually try to keep apart from women," I said.

"You are right," he answered, gravely, "and I will put what I have to say into the simplest words I know. Miss Brooke, will you do me the honor to become my wife?" His voice was coldly eager, there was anx-

iety on his face, greater courtesy than ever in the very attitude of his head; but of sentiment, of passion, not a sign. How good it was to see it! I felt as if all the love I had given in the past years—nay, all the love that had been given me, too—was being laid in its grave, and that these precise words were the will-o'-the-wisp that danced over it. I could almost hear some ghostly music, and fancy that it came from a distant empty church, that dead fingers touched the keys and brought it forth. But outwardly my manner was cold and self-possessed, as courteous, too, as his own; we were a truly well-mannered couple as we stood and arranged our marriage.

"Why do you want to marry me?" I asked, curiously.

"I have the greatest admiration and respect for you. I should be most proud and—" I do not know how he went on; all the time I was looking coldly on at the funeral of my life's romance; unknown to himself, this middle-aged diplomat with the thin face and iron-gray hair was conducting its funeral service. Suddenly I remembered the torment I

had suffered once before when I had not dared to tell Austin Brian of the past.

"I have a regard for you, Sir Noel," I said, and heard with surprise my own voice falter, but I could not steady it; "and I am an ambitious woman."

"Ah!" he gasped, faintly.

"I could only be satisfied with a man who was ambitious, too—whose career I might perhaps help, as well as share."

"It is what I desire," he said, in a low voice, as though he were making a response in church. His voice will sound like that, perhaps, when we are being married.

"But I want you to know," I went on, timidly, "that though I like you, I am not in love." I felt ashamed of the foolish word the moment it was spoken—it seemed so foreign to the matter with which we were concerning ourselves.

"I am too old to ask for that," he said, with a little sigh. He is only fifty, Nellie; men are loved at that age, nay, long past it —at any age; it is a question of the man himself, not of his years; but I thought of the story Lady Mary had told me and un-

derstood. "I do not even offer it to you," he went on, simply, "only my regard, my admiration, to make you my first and greatest consideration in life—more is beyond me; it is too late." There was a world of bygones in his voice; I knew that he was remembering, and was touched, more than I should have been had he professed to care for me, perhaps. Then I let go myself, and was given over to the fates that make one say and do what they will as they weave one's history.

"But I want you to know"—I heard myself saying with a strange manner that was not mine —"to know that in the past there were days when—when—" I rested my head down on the edge of the shelf, and could not go on. He put his hand on mine.

"My dear lady," he said gently, almost sadly, "I am asking you to give me your future, to share mine. Our pasts are our own. I cannot unbury mine; I do not ask to know yours," and he was silent.

I looked around the room; it wore a strange air, as though it understood. Do you know the suggestion of still life, of listening that

mere chairs and tables sometimes seem to have? I glanced swiftly at all the familiar things. Yes, this was the end of the story. Never through all the years should I know—should I hear—oh, Nellie, to have sauntered through the woods with Mark just once more, though it had cost me all the old sorrow and bitterness over again—nay, twice again! I would have consented to bear it gladly at that moment when I was putting all the possibilities forever away from me. Then I looked up at Sir Noel and put out my hand. He took it almost reverently.

"Am I to understand—" he asked.

"Yes," I said, and he took the other hand, too, and bending down kissed them both, and that was all.

I sat by the fire for two hours after he had gone, thinking it all over. The end had come, and for one last hour I would love Mark again, and then forever let him go. Yes, love him, though I loathed him too, and knew him to be a coward, as men are sometimes with a cowardice they only make known to women. John said the other day with a reluctance that showed it was forced from him, "I think Mark is rather

a cad, you know." I said nothing, for it was true ; yet, oh, the hardness of tearing his fingers from about my heart ! I shall have money with Sir Noel—heaps of it—position, comfort and ease all my life long. I shall be a personage more and more, for he is a man who will never be satisfied if he does not surely and steadily press forward. But, oh, to have been and had none of these things and to have married Mark. He lives in lodgings, pays his landlady two or three pounds a week, perhaps, and grumbles at her cooking; yet to have shared that life with him instead of the one to which I am giving myself—no, not myself, but some one who has taken its place. Or if he had been poorest poor, a laborer on the estate of the man I am going to marry, and we had lived in one of the little cottages, I could have been the happiest, most blessed woman alive. To have cooked his food and washed his clothes, have waited on him, watched for him, obeyed him. I would not have complained though he had been cruel, though he had sworn at me and cuffed me. I would have wept in secret and waited for that dear moment when he forgave me, and I might hear him say he loved me again and feel that it was

heaven. But there—there—it is all finished, let it be.

I do not know how late it was when Janet came in.

"I am going to marry Sir Noel," I told her.

"Thank God," she said, "for he looks like a true man and honest gentleman;" and she came and kissed me and smoothed my hair, and I wished that she were smoothing it for my coffin. Yet I am content, and would have nothing different from what it is.

Good-night, dear Nell, I am very tired. Perhaps I may sleep.

MADGE.

XXI

TO NELLIE.

April 23d

BEFORE I go to sleep I must tell you about this day, dear Nell. It finishes all. First, know that things are to be hurried on; we are to be married—Noel and I—on June 1st.

It is to be as smart a function as we can make it; but of course John has told you, and you

must come up as soon as you can and help me. Now for the rest.

The morning after I wrote last my engagement was announced in the *Post*. It brought quantities of letters, of course—among them one from Mark.

My heart sank when I saw his letter; I would not open it, I decided; after all, it was an example he had set me. So swiftly I put it into the fire and watched it burn, and felt my heart lighten as it turned to tinder.

Two days went by. Another letter. Doggedly I put in into the fire again and held it down. To-day he himself came. It is always the same; my heart beat quickly as he entered; my voice was no longer under my control. Shall I ever get rid of this madness?

"Why didn't you answer my letters?" he asked.

"I burned them. I am tired of congratulations," I said.

"I didn't send any," he answered, and looked at me in the old tormenting manner. "I told you the other day that you were inconstant," he went on; "now, you see, I was right."

I turned and faced him.

"To whom have I been inconstant?" I asked.

"You had better answer that question yourself."

His fencing made me ache with scorn.

"Have I been inconstant to you?"

"Well, yes, I should say so."

That was enough; I feared he might go, so I stood up and spoke quickly.

"It is false," I said. "Let us speak plainly, while the chance is with us, and this last time that I hope we may ever speak at all. I was never bound to you—never; you never said a word to me—never one that bound you to me or me to you."

"Words!" he said cynically.

"Yes—words. All the bonds that the world recognizes are made of words. Long ago, when I was a girl, you made love to me; you kissed me that night at Poona."

"Yes," he said, with a satisfaction that was gall to me and yet spurred me to go on, "I did."

"I thought you loved me then, and on board ship, and afterwards in London. Do you remember when we went to the studio that first day of all—"

"Perfectly," he said, calmly.

"You made me love you then, and wrung admissions from me, though you made none yourself; you took care to make none. You were always cautious; I have seen that in looking back; but I remember how you tortured me, saying I did not care for you, till I cried at last, 'I do, I do, dreadfully!' I wish my tongue had been burned before it said the words."

"They were not true, I suppose?" he asked, politely, with a shade of curiosity in his voice.

"They were, indeed; for I did love you all those days, and months and months before, and long, long afterwards, till—oh, I don't know till when. And all that summer on the river, when we were together every day, and you treated me as if we were never to be apart again, and spoke of the future as if we were going to spend it together—"

"Precisely," he remarked.

"Of course I loved you with all my heart and soul, with all my life. I should have been like one of those poor women we are not allowed to speak to openly if I could be all that I was to you and not care. Did you think me bad and

fast and wicked, since you could treat me so? I have often wondered—"

"No, I did not," he interrupted.

"Men don't make love to girls they have known all their lives, as you had known me, as you made love to me; they don't treat them as you did me, unless they love them and want to marry them."

"Perhaps I did," he said, calmly.

"Or unless they think them what I have said. Did you think me that? For I was not, Mark; I was too innocent then to know right from wrong, and trusted you wholly. When the summer was over you grew cool; you were tired of me; you had had enough—"

"Perhaps," he said.

"You talked of my marrying some day; you hoped I should be married to some one who would be as fond and proud of me as he ought to be; you talked of your future travels, and of our lives as separate ways. It nearly broke my heart: the shame, the sorrow of it, and the misery that was mine."

"Well?" he said, in an interested voice, waiting for me to go on.

"I wrote to you once about the picture we

were to paint together; you replied that we would do it further on in life, when we were both married, if I liked your wife and you liked my husband."

"It would hardly have come off otherwise," he said.

"You left me; you were cold and distant; you gave me to understand that together our lives had finished. When you came to London, after months of absence, you did not even come near me. Then one night, in sheer despair and misery—how, God knows—I got engaged to Austin Brian. I wrote and told you, and could say by heart every word of the letter you sent back; you advised me to keep to the engagement, though I had told you how it fretted me. You were sorry when it was broken off, and all the time you never made a sign by which I could suppose that you cared. Long afterwards you met me and taunted me with having been false to you, but in roundabout ways, so that I could not speak out. Now you have come back, you have been about the house, you have called me inconstant and so on; but you have made no sign of caring for me, and now again you come and taunt me. Oh, it is too

much! It was only the other day, too, that I heard you were making love to some one else—some one at Richmond."

"She is very pretty," he remarked, calmly.

"Go to her, and leave me to my life. I loved you in by-gone days—God knows I did, Mark. I was not a wicked woman; I only gave my life and heart and soul to the man who was all the world to me, for you have been that; I would have died for you in days gone by, and I should be ashamed, indeed, if it had not been so. It is my justification. I don't hate you now, but, in my heart I have a scorn for you that is boundless—a scorn that shakes me."

He hardly seemed to hear me.

"I really was fond of you in the studio days," he said, reflectively; and afterwards by the river, too; but I grew tired of that before the summer was over. I was bored. I remember seeing a girl once with very bright eyes; she was landing just as we put off, and I thought how much an hour or two with her would pick me up, and then the winter after that you did not look well—you went off rather; you were getting older, I suppose."

"Oh, Mark, was it just my youth and bloom

that took your fancy? You never had any real love for me—never any in the world?"

"Of course, one likes a pretty girl," he answered. "And, then, I am not sentimental; love is not in my way, and marrying isn't."

"But your idea was that I should keep true to you, while you should in no way be bound—in no way be true—to me."

"Precisely; that is what I meant," he said, with a smile. Then he went on, reflectively: "But I certainly liked you better than any woman I had ever seen at one time, and perhaps I do now—I don't know or wish to know. Still, since I have returned, I must frankly own that I have found you thoroughly disagreeable, and really, I don't see the least use in our going on."

"Going on with what?"

"Well, with—with nothing."

"If you did care for me in by-gone days, why didn't you say so?"

"I suppose I didn't want to be answered."

"Or raise a finger to prevent my marrying or getting engaged?"

"I did not care to."

"Then why have you taunted me with being

false to you, and what have you to do with my future, or I with yours?"

"Nothing," he said again, with the calmness and the smile that maddened me; "you are taking an old gentleman with an iron-gray mustache to yourself. He will have to do with your future, I suppose."

"While you make love to the young lady at Richmond."

"Probably; till I grow tired of her. Then I must find some one else who is pretty."

I could bear it no longer.

"Mark," I said, desperately, "go away; please go away. I cannot bear it any longer."

"Oh, certainly," he answered, with a look of almost amusement. "It is not very polite to treat an old friend so; but perhaps you are expecting—your new friend—"

"Yes, perhaps," I said, entreatingly; "only go. I cannot bear it any longer."

"Well, good-bye; your manners are very bad, that I must say. I hope they will improve when you are married." He shook hands. I listened again, that last, last time as he went down the stairs—for he shall never come up them more—but I listened now with a sigh of

relief, of thankfulness. I covered my face with my hands, and a strange peace, an almost joy, stole into my heart. Dear God, how good you have been to me! If I had married him I should have died of loathing and of scorn. It is all over, dear Nell. This is the end of the story.

24th.

I am so glad to hear that you and John are to be married a month sooner. You will enjoy Switzerland.

No, dear; Noel and I are going to Paris after our wedding on the first of June. Some one offered us a country-seat to honeymoon in, but we declined. The country is for lovers, not for him and me; we want a gay city like Paris, with plays to go to and dinners to eat. We shall be excellent companions. I look forward to it—I am almost merry. Oh Nellie, I am going to be content!

XXII

MADGE TO NELL

(AFTER FOUR YEARS)

Sept. 17, 1888.

DEAREST NELL,—We were so sorry not to see you with John. We will take excellent care of him, and send him back on Tuesday with as many birds as he will carry. I long to see you dear. We do not go to town till the session begins, but you and I will have a pleasant winter, and be much together. Kiss the baby, and tell little May that I think of her.

There is something I have often wanted to ask you; I will do so now. It is, did you destroy all those foolish letters I wrote you years ago about Mark Cuthbertson? I hope you did; tell me when you write. What a mad infatuation it was! Sometimes I look back on it with horror.

It was like a madness. How thankful I am that it ended at last! It might easily have broken my heart, or made me a bad and desperate woman; but it did neither. It only made me into somebody else, or into another self, who remembers the old one with wonder, and shrinks now and then even yet from the memory of the

pain she suffered, so keen it was and terrible.

I told you the history of it all with so many details that you ought to know the climax. I could not bring myself to mention it on my wedding-day, and I have never really had a chance since—you and John have been such gad-abouts since your marriage. It is an absurd climax — I have laughed at it since, but I thought it very tragic at the time. Three or four days before my marriage, Mark sent me a wedding present. It was a little ebony clock like that which used to strike the hours in the studio, while twilight stole in and we sat on the bamboo chairs watching the crackling wood-fire. The sight of it stupefied me, and made me shudder; it thrilled me with a something that was almost fright. I thought at first that I would send it back, but I could not: to keep it was impossible. I walked up and down looking at it half scared. What follows is like a farce.

I wrapped it up again and went to the place where we had spent that happy summer. I walked from the train towards the river, past the empty cottage where Janet and I had stayed. I stopped at the Swan, and saying that I wanted to dig up a root, borrowed a trowel.

Then I took a boat and rowed to the island where we had often gone in by-gone days. I made the boat fast, landed, threaded my way through the underwood to the oak tree beneath which we had spent so many hours. I dug a hole, deep—deep, it was the hardest work my hands ever did, and then I buried Mark's present. I covered it tightly down and turfed the ground over again. It is there now, I suppose —I wonder how it looks. Before I put it into its grave I wound it up. I heard it strike as I filled up the hole with earth, and the muffled sound frightened me. Now and then I think of it buried in the ground under the oak tree on the silent island; and I get a fantastic notion that one day, perhaps, the world as it goes round and round may somehow turn the wheels of the poor little clock and set it going again, and when that is so, I may love Mark once more, and he will love me back again; but never till then. I only think of the clock, never of him, and, thank God, Nell, I am content.

Yes, you are right, I am proud of Noel. We keep our compact; love and sentiment are ghosts to us both, and we have nothing in common with ghosts; but we are excellent friends

and good companions. I like my big London house, and the amusing mixed parties it is the fashion to give. I think sometimes of the dim crowd on the pavement outside, and wish I could bring that in, too. I like our little dinners to Tories past their prime, or to Radicals who are coming on, or the big ones which are carefully arranged so as to contain many elements. We went to the New Club one night last season—did I tell you ?—but in spite of the people we met and knew, all trying to look rowdy, we could not stand it, and came away. Yes, I am satisfied ; more and more ambitious for Noel ; proud of my salon and the men on both sides of the way who come to it ; gradually it will grow to be a power.

A child ? Children are very well for lovers like you and John. For Noel and me—well, he has a nephew, a tall, thin boy, who is now at Eton. He will be made much of later. And there is your little May; some day, perhaps, I may be her chaperon if you will let me, and I will keep all but eligible men far away from her. What else? Oh, dear Nell, there is nothing else; but I am satisfied.

ON THE WANE: A SENTIMENTAL CORRESPONDENCE.

I.

HE.

St. James Street, W.,

Monday, June 23d.

MY DEAR AND PRECIOUS ONE.—This is only a line to tell you that I shall come and dine with you and your mummy this evening, at the usual time. I have been thinking, my sweet, that we had much better be married soon. What is the good of waiting—beyond the winter anyway? We must make arrangements for the mummy, or why could she not come to us? I shall talk to you seriously about it to-night, so be prepared. I feel as if we can't go on living at different ends of London much longer; besides, what is the good of waiting?

No more time, dear, for I must post this at

once. You had my long letter this morning. Yours was just like you. I think you are the greatest darling on earth, Gwen—I have taken it very badly, you see—and I have got something for you when I come that I think you will like. Till then be good and love me. Meet me down the lane if you can, like an angel—no, like yourself, which will be better.

Your devoted JIM.

II.

HE.

Tuesday Night, June 24th.

You were so very sweet last night, beloved; I do nothing but think of you. I do trust you, darling, absolutely; and if we must wait till Christmas, why, we must. But you will come to me then, won't you? and we will be the two happiest people on earth. I can't rest till I have seen you again. I have been thinking that if you met me to-morrow at four at the Finchley Road Station we could have a long walk, and drive back in a hansom

in the cool of the evening in time for dinner. Shall we? If so, come in your big hat and the white dress, for that is how you look prettiest, you gypsy.

Your devoted JIM.

III

SHE

HAMPSTEAD,

Wednesday Morning, June 25th.

ONLY to say of course I will, darling. I will do anything you like. You looked so handsome last night that I was "shocking" proud of you, as you would say. Mother says the sound of you in the house makes the whole place joyful. It does. I shall love a long walk—dear you, to think of it. I'll be there in the big hat and the white dress, according to the orders of His Majesty the King.

His very loving

GWEN.

IV

HE

(A MONTH LATER)

Wednesday, July 25th.

DEAREST CHILD,—Sorry I could not come yesterday afternoon; it's an awful pull up that hill, and the day was so blazing hot that I confess I shirked it. You understand, don't you, darling? I'll come and dine on Friday anyway. My mother says you must go and stay with her this autumn. She is enjoying her month in town, I think. Good-bye, my child, no more time. I'm awfully vexed now I didn't charter a hansom yesterday to go up that blessed hill on the top of which it pleases you to live, or climb it on all fours, for I want to see you badly. I have been very busy, and naturally, while my mother is here, I have less time than usual. Your loving

JIM.

V

SHE

Wednesday Night.

YES, old darling, I quite understand, and I'll count the hours till Friday. Of course I was disappointed yesterday, but I tried to console myself by thinking that you might have got sunstroke if you had come; and then in the evening, when I felt very downhearted, I read over a heap of your letters— I mean those you sent me in the winter, when you first loved me. They were so very loving that they made me quite happy again. Am I just the same to you? I don't know why I ask it; something makes me do so. Do you remember that night we walked up and down the garden till nearly twelve o'clock and talked of all manner of serious things? I often think of it. You said that when we were together we would work and read and try to understand the meaning of many things that seemed like lesson-books in the wide world's school, and that now, in the holiday-time, we did not want to think about. The lesson-time would surely come, you said, so that we need not

grudge ourselves, our laughter and our joy. I remember that you said, too, that work was the most important thing in life, and I have been wondering if that is so. It seems rather a cold gospel. But perhaps you are right. Your love, for instance, will only make my happiness; but your work may help the whole world. Is that what you meant, darling? All this because of that happy night when you took my face between your hands and looked at me almost solemnly and said, "This dear face is my life's history, thank God for that." I love you so—oh, so much when I think of your voice—but I love you always. GWEN.

VI

HE

Thursday Morning.

YOU DEAR SWEET,—You are a most serious person, and a darling and a goose, and I long to kiss you; but look here, Gwennie, I can't come Friday either. Marsden insists having half-a-dozen men to dine with

him at the Club, and there must I be in the midst of them. Will Saturday do? Nice day Saturday, comes before Sunday, you know: best preparation in the world for it (seeing that I shall be made to go to church next morning and stay till the end of the sermon) will be seeing you the night before. I think I shall have to take a run to Clifton for a little bit next week, if so I shall miss your garden party, I fear; but we'll talk about this on Saturday.

Yours ever and ever as you know.

JIM.

Work? Of course we must work. It is one's rent in the world, and honest folk must pay their way. Your work is to love me.

VII.

SHE

Thursday Night.

YES, Jim dear, and I will always do it. Come on Saturday. I shall be miserable if you are not at our garden-party, and fear I shall hardly have heart to go on with it. I am a selfish thing; but as you say will talk of it on Saturday. Your loving GWEN.

VIII

HE

(*A telegram.*)

Saturday, 7:30 P. M.

AWFULLY sorry. Relations turned up. Insist on my dining. Will come Monday.

JIM.

IX

SHE.

Sunday, July 29th.

Of course it could not be helped, dearest yet when your telegram came I sat down and wept as devoutly as if I had been by the waters of Babylon. Relations are *exigeants*, I know, and you were quite right to go to them, yet I did so long for you; Our little feast was ready, and I was ready; in the blue dress that you said I looked pretty in. I had pinned a rose on my shoulder, and wondered if you would pull it leaf by leaf away, you did last time, do you remember? I shuddered while I thought of it. It was like—but I will not even write it. Oh, Jim dear, how well we can sometimes make ourselves shiver at

the impossibilities! I know you love me, but the little things that have kept you away from me oftener than usual lately make me foolish and nervous; they are like thongs that threaten to become a whip, and would if you stayed away too long. But you won't? You know that I love you, as you do me, and that I am weaker and cannot bear the days apart as you can, you who have many things to fill your life, while I have only you to fill mine—only you, for whom I would die, and think death sweet if it did you even the least little good.

When I was ready last night I went out and walked up and down under the veranda, before the windows. I looked in at the drawing-room and thought of how we would sit there on the little low sofa after dinner, watching the shadows that always seem to come stealing through the fir-trees; and of how we would talk, as we always do, or of the days when we wondered and guessed about each other, and were afraid and hoped; or of how we would plan our future life and arrange the things we would some day do together. The dining-room window was open, and I looked in there, too, at our table spread, at the great roses in the bowl, and the candles

ready for lighting. I thought of how you would sit at the head, as though you were master already, and of how, when we had nearly come to an end, dear mother would rise, as she always does, and say, "You will not mind if I go, dears; I am very tired?" and you would open the door and she would pass out, giving you a little smile as she went; and then you would come back and stoop and kiss me and say, "My darling," just as you always do, and each time seems like a first time. But you did not come, and did not come—and then there was a telegram. I know the quick, loud sound, the clangingness that only the telegraph boy puts into the bell, as well as I know your footstep. Sometimes my heart bounds to it; it leaps to heaven for a moment, for it means that you are coming; and sometimes it sinks. Oh, my darling, if you only knew how it almost stands still sometimes!—it did last night—for it means that you are not coming.

Jim, dear, I am a fool. I know you could not help it. But I love you dearly, and will all my life. I kiss the paper because your hands will touch it. Good-night, my own. GWEN.

X

HE

Monday Morning.

YOU SWEET THING,—Your letter almost makes me ashamed of myself. You do love me, Gwen, and I am not half good enough for you. I wonder how I dared go in for a girl like you, or what I ever did to please God that He should give me a love like yours. I often think that you will be awfully disappointed when you get me every day of your life and find out what a commonplace beggar I am. You are certain to find that out anyhow. And yet, why should you? Does not Browning say:

> "God be thanked, the meanest of His creatures,
> Boasts two soul-sides, one to face the world with,
> One to show a woman when he loves her."

I don't suppose that I am the meanest of His creatures, but I am not as good as you, dear. There is a sort of looking-aheadness towards Heaven in you that is wholly lacking in me. I have felt that very keenly lately, and wondered whether any vanity would let me stand being made the subject of your being disillusioned about mankind later on. There is one thing certain: whatever happens to us in the future,

we have the memory of good love behind us; for I have loved you, Gwen dear; always remember that.

I will come up this evening, and we will have a happy time together. I think I must go to Clifton, after all. Mrs. Seafield wants me to help them through with Tommy's coming of age. Awfully nice woman, Mrs. Seafield, and one ought to encourage nice people by doing what they wish occasionally. Be good. Don't get low-spirited or entertain ghosts unawares, or do anything but love me till I come, and then I will tell you that I love you, which will be better than saying it here.

I think you ought to go away for a bit; you strike me, from your letters, as being a little strained and run down. It's all my fault, isn't it, dearest? For I prevented you from going to Italy last winter by making you be engaged to me; and then we didn't want to put the big distance between us. Till to-night,

Your loving JIM.

XI

HE

(*A Telegram.*)

CLIFTON, *August 3d.*

No time to write. Garden-party, etc., Friday. Letter to-morrow. Staying till Wednesday. JIM.

XII

SHE

Tuesday, August 7th.

DEAREST JIM.—I have been hoping and hoping to hear from you. Is anything the matter, darling? Are you ill? Has a letter miscarried? Are you angry with me? I cannot believe that four whole days have passed without a word, and yet I know that I am foolish to worry myself, for this silence is probably due to some trivial accident. But you are all the wide world to me—you and my mother; and in these last days apart you seemed to have tightened and tightened round my heart till I cannot even breathe without thinking of you, and the least little bit of fear about you makes me miserable.

I am very foolish, Jim, for on Monday night

after you had gone I sat up till it was nearly daylight thinking over your words and looks. I fancied they had been different—that you had been different altogether lately. Perhaps it is only a calm setting in, a reaction after the wild love-making of the winter, when you seemed unable to live a single day without me. It could not be always like that; I knew it even at the time. Perhaps I fancy it all; write and tell me that I do. But I have felt since Monday as if only the ghost of your love remained to me. You didn't seem so glad to be with me; you did not look at me so often, and you broke off to talk of outside things just when I thought your heart was full of me and love of me.

Your mother came yesterday. She did not stay long. She did not ask me to go to her in the autumn. She said that she had heard from you, and my heart gave a throb of pain, knowing that I had not had a line. In her manner she seemed to divine that you had changed. I went upstairs after she had gone and praved that if it were so I might never know it. But for my poor mummy I could have killed myself, so as to die in the midst of uncertainty that was torture, and yet joy com-

pared to the knowledge that might come—the knowledge that your love had gone from me,

But to-night I am ashamed of all my foolishness, all my fears, and reproaching myself for doubting you ; for I know that you love me—I do indeed. I live over all your words and looks. Do you remember that night by the pond—we stole out by the garden-gate—when you said nothing could ever part us ; that I was never, never to doubt you, no matter if you yourself had made me do so for the moment? You made me swear I never would. You looked down and said "My sweet wife," and made me say, "Yes, Jim, your wife" after you, because you wanted me to feel that the tie between us could never be broken. It is the memory of those words, of that night, that helps me through the misery and wicked doubting of you now. Come and beat me for the doubting with a thick thick, stick, and I will count each stroke as joy, and love you more and more for every one that falls. It is the memory of that night, too, that makes me send you this—that gives me courage to pour out all my heart to you. The days have passed for make-believes between us : I cannot pretend to you ; I am yours, your own,

and very own, Write me one line and make me happy again, and forgive me, or scold me, or do what you will, so that you love me—tell me that, and I shall be once more what I have been all these months, the happiest, most blessed girl in the whole wide world,

GWEN.

XIII.

HE

Wednesday, August 8th.

DEAREST GWEN,—What a sentimental child you are! I have been busy: tennis, dances, garden-party, picnic, Tommy coming of age, and speeches—all sorts of things crowded into a week. No time for letter-writing. It is very jolly here, and everything uncommonly well managed. Nice people in the neighborhood; dinner-party last night; took in Ethel Bertram—handsome girl, beautiful dark eyes, said to be worth a pile of money.

I think you ought to have more occupation, dear; you seem to be so dependent now on your affections and emotions; you want some-

thing more to fill your life. I wish you had a younger companion than your mother—you must try and get one somehow. I am going on to Devonshire, on Thursday, for two or three weeks, and shall, perhaps, stay here again for a day or two on my way back. Don't fidget, dear child. No more time. JIM.

XIV

SHE

Thursday, 9th.

JIM, darling, don't say I am sentimental—it sounds like a reproach; but you know we always write each other foolish, loving letters. I am glad you are having a good time. I suppose it was very foolish of me to be unhappy, but it has been so odd to find morning after morning going by and no sign from you. You spoiled me at first by writing every day.

You didn't say you loved me in your note—tell me that you do next time; but don't write till you want to do so. Be happy, darling, and I will be happy too, in thinking of you.

GWEN.

XV

HE

(*A Telegram.*)

HORRABRIDGE, S. DEVON,

Friday, August 11th.

HAD letter yesterday. Will write soon. Here for some days. JIM.

XVI

SHE

Thursday, August 22d.

JIM, dear, do send me a line. It is nearly a fortnight since I heard from you, and for a long time your letters have been different, they have indeed, though I have tried to disguise it from myself. I cannot bear it any longer. Tell me what it all means, for it must mean something. Speak out, I implore you. You are not afraid of me, are you, darling? Your own loving GWEN.

XVII

HE

HORRABRIDGE, *August 24th.*

It is strange how quickly a woman divines; and your heart has told you what I have not had the courage to say. Gwen, dear, I want to break it off, not because I do not think you what I have always thought you, or because I care for any one else, but simply because I want to be free. Our engagement no longer gives me the pleasure it did ; I look forward to marriage as a sort of bondage into which I do not want to enter. I am perfectly frank with you because I feel that in an important matter like this it is only right. Then, dear, you know my mother never approved of it; parents are prudent people, and she thought the whole business unwise. I struggled against her reasoning all I could, for I loved you, and thought of your face, and of how you loved me. But Gwen, dear, there is a good deal in what she says. You see you couldn't leave your mother; and we should have to be careful about money; for I am not a frugal beggar, and there are lots of difficulties. I ought to have thought of them before, but

you were so sweet and good, a thousand times too good for me, that I could think of nothing but you. Say you forgive me, and believe that I have loved you, for I have, and you won't hold me to it, will you, Gwen? I know this will cost you a great deal, but you are a brave girl and will bear it; and don't reproach me—I could not bear your reproaches. I am a scoundrel and I know it, a ruffian, or I should love you beyond all things, as I ought. J.

XVIII

SHE

August 25th.

HOLD you to it when you want to be free? I would not be so much of a cobweb. Thank God that in your letter you were able at least to say that you had loved me. Reproach you? Why should I? Men are different from women—it is not for women to judge them. Besides, I love you—I say it once more for this last time on earth—so much and so truly that I cannot be angry, much less reproachful. Go, and be happy, my darling. God bless you, and good-bye. GWEN.

XIX

HE

(A MONTH LATER.)

September 25th.

I BELIEVE I ought to ask you for my letters back. Will you send them, or write and say that you have burned them ?—which you prefer. Forgive me for troubling you. J. F.

P. S.—I was so sorry to hear through the Markhams that you had been ill.

XX

SHE

HAMPSTEAD, *September 27th.*

I SEND back your letters, and your ring, and other things. I ought to have sent them before, but I could not. I am glad you asked for them. Thank you, I am better ; and to-morrow we start for Montreux, and stay there through the winter ; perhaps much longer.

Yours, G. W.

XXI

HE

(A YEAR LATER.)

LONDON, *July 30th.*

MY DEAR GWEN—(Forgive me, but I cannot bring myself to address you any more formally) —I saw your dear mother's death in the paper, yesterday. You have not been out of my thoughts since. Perhaps I ought not to write to you, but I can't help telling you how grieved I am for all that you must be suffering. It seems so rough that you should be left alone in the world. I heard that your Aunt Mary was with you, and I hope that you may be going to live with her; but probably you are not able yet to think of your future.

Of course I do not know if you are coming back to England soon; but if not, and there is anything I could get or do for you over here, or anything I could do for you at any time, I can't tell you what a privilege I should think it. This is not time to say it, perhaps, but I respect no woman on earth as I do you, and I should think it the greatest honor to be of service to you. I dare not hope that you will send

me any reply to this, still less that you ever think of me kindly. But do believe how true is my sympathy. Yours always, J. F.

XXII

SHE

GLION, *August* 5th.

THANK you for your letter; Yes my dear mother is gone; it seems so strange and still without her. I sit and stare into an empty world. Thank you; but there is nothing you can do for me. I always think of you kindly. Why should I not do so?

I am going to live with Aunt Mary. My mother arranged it all. We are not coming back to England yet; we stay here a little time, then go down to Montreux again for winter.

Yours, G. W.

XXIII

HE

(SIX MONTHS LATER)

February 1*st.*

I DON'T know how I am going to write to you; I have been longing to do it for months past and not daring.

It will be better to plunge at once. Gwennie, could you forgive me and take me back? I should not be mad enough to think it possible, but that I know you to be the dearest girl on earth, and the most constant. You did love me once, and though perhaps you will only laugh at my audacity, deep down in my heart something tells me that you care for me a little bit still, or at least that you could care for me again. I remember you saying in one of your last letters that the time had passed for make-believes between us; and if in spite of all, you have any feeling left for me, I know that you will tell me frankly and truly just as a less noble woman would hide it.

I have often wondered how I could throw away a love like yours. I must have been mad. I know now what it is, having once had it, to be without it. You are far more to me than you were in the old days—far more than any words can tell. I am always thinking of you —you are never out of my thoughts. Oh, my darling, forgive me and take me back! Longing for a word from you, yet hardly daring to hope—I am yours, loving you. J.

XXIV

SHE

February 3rd.

YES, I am just the same. I never loved any one but you, and I have not left off loving you. I think I have known that you would come back to me. It feels like finding my way home, just when all the world was at an end. You do not know what anguish I have suffered and how I have tried to be brave; but without you, without my mother—O God! But now some light seems to be breaking through the darkness.

Yours once more, Jim, dear—my Jim again.

GWEN.

XXV

HE

February 5th.

MY SWEET GWEN, MY OWN DEAR GIRL,—I kissed your little letter and longed to kiss you. You are a million times too good for me, but you shall be happy this time if I can make you so. I can't believe that we are all right again. I should like to go down on my knees and ask you to forgive me for all I did, only I am such

an impudent beggar that kneeling isn't much in my line.

And when shall we be married, my sweet? You had much better take possession of me as soon as possible—not that there is any fear of my going astray any more, but there's nothing to wait for, is there? When are you coming back from Montreux? Shall I come out and fetch you? I should like to—in fact, I should rush off this very minute just to look at your dear face again, but that I am rather in awe of Aunt Mary—and I am rather in awe of you, too, my darling—and half afraid of seeing you for the first time. It is all too good to be true—at least, it feels so just yet. I could get away for a whole fortnight in March, and I don't think I can go longer than that without seeing you. It is horrible to remember all the months in which we have been apart. Let us be together now, and forever, as soon as it is possible. We will be so happy, the fates won't know us.

Your happy and devoted

JIM.

XXVI

SHE

February 12th.

DEAR,—Your letter almost made me laugh —it was just like you.

It is very strange to sit down and write to you again and to know that all is right between us. I don't realize it yet; but I shall soon, I suppose. Now, I feel as if I were inside a dream, groping about, trying to find my way into the waking world and half fearing that there it would be different. But life has become a restful thing again; some of the aching loneliness seems to have been swept out of my heart—not all, for I miss my dear mother terribly, and keep longing to tell her about this; it chokes me to think she cannot hear, that, perhaps, she does not know.

My dear old Jim, how glad I am to come back to you and to be loved again! In my thoughts I listen to the sound of your laughter, and see your face, and hear your quick footstep. I shall laugh, too, presently, but now I am still too much crushed by the remembrance of the past months, as well as overcome by this great

happiness, to do anything but be very grave and silent. Soon I shall grow used to it, and shake my bells again. For some strange reason I don't want you to come just yet. I am afraid of you, too, and yet I long to see and hear and know, not merely dream, as I half do still, that you love me again, and that all the old life is going to begin once more. But come in March; Aunt Mary talks of going back to England in April.

We must not be married just yet, not till the summer is over, till the year is past—till I am your frivolous Gwennie again, instead of a grave person in a sober black gown. Dear Jim, I begin to think how wonderful it will be to be with you all my life, to do things for you, to fetch and carry and be useful. A woman's hands always long to be busy for those she loves; since mother died mine have been idle—they are waiting for you. If I could only get rid of the tiredness that is still in my heart and soul—but I shall when I am with you. We will read and talk and think, and take long walks together—all this will make me strong again. We will begin when you come here—to this beautiful place. The snow is on the

mountains white and thick, and the lake is blue. When the sun shines I wonder if heaven itself can be much better. Good night, dear Jim. Your GWEN.

XXVII

HE

February 15th.

ALL right, my darling, I will come in March! I can hardly believe that I am going to see you again so soon; and oh, Gwennie, it is good to feel that you are mine again. You dear wifely thing, to plan how you will take care of me with your two sweet hands. I want you to have your ring back, my precious one; I shall bring it with me and put it on your finger.

I have been considering ways and means. Do you know that I am growing rich, and can give you many more luxuries and pretty frocks and things than I could have managed before? What do you say to a flat to begin with, somewhere on the right side of the park, not too far from the Club? My mother had one last

year for a few months, and said it was much better and less trouble than a house.

Have you had a new photograph taken lately? I want to see if your face looks just the same, and what you have done with your dimple. I don't like to think of you in a black gown, my poor darling; you must try and put it off as soon as you can. I want to see you in the old blue one, and I would give anything to walk about with you once again in the garden at Hampstead. I often think of your face as it used to look under the trees, and of how we used to steal out in the dusk by the garden door, and over the heath and round by the pond. It is a thousand times better to think of than your Swiss mountains and blue lake out there. But I shall come and see those too, soon, and then I shan't be jealous of them any more. Tell me in your next letter that you love me, my darling (you didn't in your last), and that I am just the same to you as you are to me, only you are a hundred times more—more and more every day.

Your adoring old JIM.

XXVIII

SHE

February 20th.

MY DEAREST JIM,—I am just the same, darling, and I love you; but I have not your wild spirits; that is all. The past year has sobered me down—only one year, as time is measured, but it has made me many long ones older.

I am glad you are growing rich; it shows that the world likes you. Yes, dear, we will have a flat if you like and where you like. It would be nice if we could get one somewhere away from noise and hurry. I long for a cosey room with book-shelves round it, and a library that will grow and grow, and prove that we have new books very often. I hope we shall do heaps of reading, for I have become quite studious; you will hardly know your frivolous sweetheart. But the walks by the lake or along the upper roads day after day, always alone amid the silences, have set me thinking. The world seems to have stretched out so far and to be so full of things its wants to tell us if we will but listen. I long to talk about them

with you. We were young, and so much taken up with ourselves in the old days that we had little time to think of all that is most to us—after love.

You shall not scoff at this lovely place, you dear, bad person. I long to take you up to Les Avants, and over the way to Savoy, and to make you look towards the Rhone Valley—there at the head of the lake with the mountains on either side forming a gateway. I made a dozen romances about the far, far off in which the valley ends almost at the feet of Italy, till the other day when I was sadly taken down by Uncle Alfred who was here. I told him of all the mysteries and fairy stories that seemed to be lurking in the valley, and he laughed and said there was none there; it was only very long and very uninteresting, and might be described as Switzerland run to seed. I see it with such different eyes; but then they are not the eyes that are in my head. People say that Death is a scene-shifter; and so is every new experience. Experience has made all things look different to me; only those that are in my memory remain the same, all that I actually see and hear have changed.

Are you fond of the world, Jim, and do you think much about it? It seems such an absurd question, and yet it is not. I mean the world in itself. I have learned to see that it is very beautiful, and to feel so reverential when I think of all the human feet that have walked through it, and all the hands that have worked for it. I want to do my share of the work in it, too, if it be possible: I should like to make it something beautiful. A little while ago I read Mazzini; do you remember that he says we ought to regard the world as a workshop in which we have each to make something good or beautiful with the help of the others? I am not strong enough to do anything by myself, but if you and I together could ever do it, even the least little good, darling, it would be something to remember thankfully. We would count it as our tribute in return for each other's love, which it had given us. Sometimes I have thought that the world is like a great bank into which we put good and evil, joy and sorrow, for all the coming generations to draw upon. We won't leave them any evil or sorrow if we can help it, will we? I should never have done anything by myself save brood and dream; but now it seems

as if a door is opening and we shall go through together to find a hundred things that we must do. I am so ambitious for you, Jim. I want you to do and be so much; and nothing achieved will ever seem enough or wholly satisfy me. I want you to climb the heavenly heights, my darling, not in the ordinary sense, but in work and deeds. Do you understand? Oh, how I pray that you do!

I am half ashamed to write all this to you. But so many things have crept into my heart and soul in these long months, and between the hours of sorrow and pain, and I do not want you to be a stranger among thoughts and longings I never expected to put into words. I wish I knew of the things that you think about, in the inner life that most of us live silently, and seldom speak of at all. We only can speak of them to the one person we love best, or to some strange being we may not even love, but that our soul seems to recognize as if it had found one it had known centuries before, or in some shadowy dream-land of which it could not give account. There are many walls of silences to break down between us, and many things on which we must build together before we know

each other absolutely. Let us try to begin at once. Oh, Jim, don't laugh at me for writing all this! Remember I have only you in the wide world now. I love my mother still; I ache and long for her, but it is a different love from that which is given to the living—it is more like religion. I cannot hear her voice, or see her face; my hands cannot touch her: I have only you now in my human life. And it is a blessed rest, darling, to have your love again. I think I was dying of tiredness; but now I shall grow very strong—strong to love you, dear.

Always your GWEN.

XXIX

HE

February 25th.

YOU are a dear, sweet, beloved child; but don't let us discuss heaven and earth and the musical glasses in our love-letters—just yet at any rate. No doubt we shall come to it in time and double dummy too; but let us wait our turn. Tell me you love me again. I shall

never get tired of hearing that; and in your next letter could you not say, "I send you a kiss, Jim," then I shall know it really is all right. I send you a thousand, just like Mary Jane the cook's young man.

I want to see you so much, you precious thing, that I am going to rush to you next week. Then we can go to Savoy and Les Avants and anywhere else you please. I shan't mind how long the walks are, or how lonely. You can bet we won't talk very big talk, but we'll be happier than any two people have been since Adam and Eve before they let the serpent in. I can't live any longer without seeing your dear face, and I think of starting on Tuesday. Shall I be welcome?—say, you gypsy. You will only just have time to send one more letter before I start; make it a nice one, my sweet. Your devoted JIM.

XXX

SHE

February 27th.

DEAREST,—You would have been welcome, but all our arrangements are suddenly altered. Aunt Mary has some important business, and

we start for England to-morrow. We arrive on Wednesday morning. Isn't this good news, old dear? I am so glad that I don't want to talk about anything but happiness now—not even of heaven and earth and the musical glasses. I am afraid of myself—of my two feet that will walk toward you, and my two eyes that will see you, and my ears that will hear you. I love you, and you know it. Good-bye till we meet. I will telegraph from Dover.

Your own GWEN.

P. S.—Oh, but I can't, I am shy; and it's so long since—

XXXI

(THREE WEEKS LATER)

BRYANSTON ST., *March 26th.*

DEAREST JIM,—Don't come this evening; there are so many things to look through; I must begin them indeed.

Thank you for your letter; you are very good to me, dear. GWEN.

XXXII

HE

March 27th.

VERY well, my darling, I'll wait till to-morrow. Is anything the matter with you, sweet? It is odd, but since the first rush of meeting you have seemed so grave, and there is a little stately reserve that clings to you and makes me feel out in the cold. I cannot even guess of what you are thinking: before I always knew without your telling me. Don't be like that with me, dear one. Let us be just as we were in the old days. I love you ten times more than I used, and there is something sad in your face that makes me loathe myself for all the pain I once caused you. You have forgiven me, haven't you, my darling? I was a brute, but I know it; and I love you with all my heart. Your devoted JIM.

XXXIII

SHE

April 2d.

DEAREST JIM,—I am sorry, but I can't go to the National Gallery to-morrow. Aunt Mary

wants me to help her a good deal just now. We think of going to Torquay for a little bit. This English wind is very cutting.

Thank you, dearie, for the magazines and the flowers. You are much too good to me; I often think that. GWEN.

XXXIV

HE

April 4th.

MY DARLING,—What is the matter? You are always making excuses now; don't you care about seeing me? Have I offended you? Send me one line. My love for you has grown through all the months you were away, but I can't help fearing that yours for me has waned. JIM.

XXXV

SHE

April 6th.

Yes, Jim dear, I care about seeing you, of course; but I have so many things to think about. Aunt Mary's cough is much worse,

and we have decided to go off to Torquay at once. We shall be gone by the time you get this. I am so sorry not to have seen you again, but we shall be back in a fortnight if it is warmer. Oh, Jim dear, once more you are too good to me! Why have you sent me that packet.

Your grateful GWEN.

XXXVI

SHE

(*A Telegram*)

April 8th.

THE address is Belle Vue, Torquay. Aunt Mary better: will write to-morrow.

XXXVII

HE

LONDON, *April 8th.*

GWEN, DEAR,—This can't go on. Things are all wrong between us. I felt it even the first evening you came back. What is the matter? Do tell me, my darling. Is it anything that I have said or done? With greater love than words can tell.

Your miserable old JIM.

XXXVIII

SHE

(*A Telegram*)

April 10th.

Will write to-morrow. It is very difficult. Have been thinking day and night what to say, but you shall hear without fail to-morrow.

XXXIX

SHE

TORQUAY, *April 11th.*

JIM,—I am miserable too, more miserable than words can say. I want you to do for me what I did for you before—to set me free and let me go. I have struggled against it, tried, reasoned with myself, but all to no purpose. It is no use disguising the truth cost you or me what it may. I am changed but I cannot tell why nor how, only that it is so. Dear Jim, forgive me, I entreat you, and let me go. GWEN.

XL

HE

LONDON, *April 12th,*

DEAREST,—But there must be some meaning to this. Write and tell me what it is. You must care for me still, darling; you could not have been true to me all this time if you could change so easily. Write and tell me what has come over you. Perhaps it is something that I can explain away; I cannot bear to let you go. Speak out, I implore you, darling. JIM.

XLI

SHE

TORQUAY, *April 13th.*

I DO not know what has come over me. I do care for you, but I think it is simple affection or friendship that I feel—I am not in love any more. I did not know it at Montreux. Every day since we parted I had lived in the memory of your love. I thought I was just the same, and never dreamed of change till after we came

back—then I found it out. All the life, all the reality, all the sunshine, seem to have gone out of my love for you. I used to feel my heart beat quick when you came; now it does not. I used to hear your footstep with a start of joy; it is nothing to me now; I listen to it curiously, or with a little dismay. I am not eager when you come, and cannot make myself so! I never go forward to meet you. Have you not noticed how I stand still on the hearth-rug as you enter? Something holds me there with a sense of guilty coldness in my heart. Have you not felt the silence fall between us when we try to talk? We have nothing to say; and while we sit and stare at each other my soul seems to be far off, living another life. It is almost a relief when you go; yet I dread the tenderness of your good-bye. I used to think of home together as the dearest life; now I wonder how we should drag through the days. There are places I want to see, things I want to do, plans to think over, books to read: and between all these you seem to stand like a fate. It is my fault—all, all. You are just the same, but I am different; and I can't marry you, Jim; I can't indeed. I know the

pain I am costing you; did I not suffer it through long, long months? But believe that I have tried to be true—tried and tried, dear. I did not dream till we met that only the ghost of the old love remained—the memory of it, the shadow; that the reality had slipped away; that pain had quenched it. I would give the wide world to be once again the girl who loved you, who was so merry and so happy, who used to walk about the Hampstead garden counting the minutes till you came. But it is no good. I am a woman, with only a remembrance of the girl, and I am altogether different. Forgive me, dear Jim; forgive me and let me go.

GWEN.

XLII

HE

April 14th.

MY DARLING,—I can't do it; for God's sake don't throw me over, for I can't face it. It is all fancy, dear. You have been ill and strained and worried; you have been left too much alone; you have grown too introspective;

wait, and it will all come right again. I love you more and more every day; and after all the months in which I loved you, and never dared to make a sign, you won't treat me like this? Think of the days we spent together long ago, and the plans we made. You are not going to chuck them all way? I would do anything on earth for you, and you shall have my whole life's devotion. Write and tell me that you will take it, my darling, and bear with me, and try to love me again. I can't let you go, Gwen. Its no good, I can't face it.

Your adoring and devoted and miserable old JIM.

XLIII

SHE

April 15th.

BUT, Jim dear, you must—you must set me free. I can't go on; it is not that I am strained or morbid or too introspective, or anything of the sort, only this—I can't marry you, and I can't. Sorrow and loneliness have

made me think, have opened my eyes wide, and and I see that we are strangers inwardly, even while outwardly we are lovers. You loved me at Hampstead for my laughter, my love of you, my big hat, the shady garden, my gladness to be loved—for a hundred things that do not belong to the life that is mine now. So, too, I loved you back, because of your merry voice. your handsomeness, your love of me—because of the holiday-time we made of life when we were together. But that time is over for ever and ever. You cannot give me back my laughter, my girlhood, the happiness that almost frightened me; they are gone, they will never find their way to me again; and my love for you was bound up with them—it has gone, too. Sometimes my heart cries out, longing for its old feelings again, till I feel like Faust before he conjured Mephistopheles to him, save for his years—the actual years that time doles out; or like a Hindoo for whom the time has come to vanish into the forest and dream. Only twenty-three, Jim, but youth has gone; you cannot have back the girl who laughed and loved you so—she does not exist; parting and silence killed her. It sounds like a reproach, but God knows it is not

one. And no new feelings have grown up to take the place of the old ones that are dead. We are almost strangers, and I cannot reconcile myself to the thought of our being more than friends. I even shrink from you and shudder. Your laughter does not gladden me; your talk does not hold my senses any longer; and concerning the things of which I think most my lips of themselves refuse to speak.

The very ring on my finger frets and worries me. In the old days I used to kiss it, and wish it hurt me, that it burned or bit, so that I might feel through pain, as through all things, the joy of loving you. But now I turn and twist it round as a prisoner does his fetter, longing, yet afraid, as he is unable to shake it off, till you shall give me leave and set me free.

You can't marry me, Jim dear, feeling as I do now. It would be madness. It is of no use making our whole lives a failure, or a tragedy, because we have not the courage to face the pain of parting now. If I thought you would be happy with me I would hesitate, but we should neither of us be happy. And it is not as if this were a passing phase; I know that it is not. I live in another world from you now

I do not know if it is better or worse, only that it is different; it seems as if in the past months a hand was stretched out; I took it and went on, almost dazed—on and on while you stood still. I am going farther, and shall never return, but you will be in the world behind me. There may be happiness for me, and life and love once more; I do not know; but it will be far, far off, away from you. Between us all things have finished. I cannot turn and go back into the old year, the old love, the old life; I have passed them all by for good or ill. Oh, Jim understand and let me go! forgive me all the pain I have cost you, and let me go.

GWEN.

XLIV

HE

April 15th.

ALL right—go. I thought you the most constant girl on earth: that you loved me as I do you. Since it pleases you to play fast and loose with me, let it be so. My feelings, of course, are of no account weighed against your fancies, You have shaken all my faith in women; for I did believe in you, Gwen. Good-bye, JIM.

XLV

SHE

(A WEEK LATER)

April 2d.

I SEND back your letters and things once more—it is better to get it over. Return mine or burn them as you please. Aunt Mary cannot stand this English climate, and we start almost immediately for Italy; probably to live there altogether. I think it will be a relief to you to know this. I hope with all my heart that you will soon forget the pain I have given you, that all good things may come to you; and one day I hope that you will marry some one who will make you happy, and love you as I did long ago in the dear days at Hampstead.

Good-bye, GWEN.

THE END.

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